

THE MAN FROM **U.N.C.L.E.**

MAGAZINE

MAY 50c PDC

**NAPOLEON SOLO
ILLYA KURYAKIN**

AMERICA'S
FAVORITE
U.N.C.L.E.s
HAVE A DATE
WITH DANGER!

in —

**THE
SYNTHETIC
STORM
AFFAIR**

A NEW Complete Novel by
ROBERT HART DAVIS



[image]

The Synthetic Storm Affair

By I.G. Edmonds

May 1967

Volume 3, Issue 4

Deadly beyond belief was the secret THRUSH had learned—how to goad Nature herself into a frenzy that could ravage the world as Illya and Solo sought the perverted madman who could summon the very hurricane of hell to do his bidding.

The Atoll of a Thousand Deaths, men called it. From it maddened nature would unleash a storm which would engulf all mankind, unless Solo and Illya could get there before it was too late—and still stay alive!

ACT I: A STORMY FUTURE

ACT II: THE STRANGE STORM

ACT III: THE STORM GIRL

ACT IV: VANISHING LADY

ACT V: "SO LONG, LUPE!"

ACT VI: WATERLOO?

ACT VII: GIRL IN THE DARK

ACT VIII: INTO THE STORM

ACT IX: THE CRASH

ACT X: THE THRUSH OUTPOST

ACT XI: THE PASSING STORM

ACT I: A STORMY FUTURE

It had been a most trying business, that *Stolen Steamer Affair*, and Napoleon Solo, felt that he had earned a good rest. And what better way to spend a vacation in Rio than in the company of an extremely beautiful woman?

Solo surveyed himself in the full length mirror in his suite in Rio de Janeiro. Slender, medium height, with dark hair and a cleft chin, he admitted that he wasn't exactly a Dracula in appearance. But he also wondered what there was about him that beat the time of two Hollywood movie stars for the company of luscious Lula LaAmour.

Lula, along with the other Hollywood types, was in Rio to film an extravaganza called "Rompin' in Rio." Napoleon had only asked her for a date from force of habit he had when meeting any lovely unattached young woman.

It surprised him when she accepted instead of taking up invitations from the handsome actors. Movie stars aren't easy to date. But although he thought her crazy, he was grateful for her idiocy. Lula was the new Marilyn Monroe. A latter-day version of Jean Harlow. The reincarnated spirit of original vampire, Theda Bara.

Napoleon Solo adjusted the carnation in his evening clothes lapel and thought with genuine pleasure of the envy his entrance with the film queen would elicit from his colleagues, Illya Kuryakin and Mark Slate. He even hoped that April Dancer, the Girl from U.N.C.L.E., would be a bit jealous.

Solo grinned at his image. "We know how Don Juan must have felt, eh, old chap?" he said.

He looked at his watch. It was almost time to pick up Lula. He started for the door and stopped when he remembered that he had not called Illya Kuryakin, to let the other U.N.C.L.E. agent know that he would not be available that evening for anything less than a four-alarm emergency.

But as he walked over to pick up the telephone, it rang. He picked it up.

"Harmon," he said, using the name he was registered under.

"Mr. Harmon?" Napoleon recognized the slightly Spanish accent of the

hotel desk clerk. "I have a message for you from New York. The gentleman who called said it was most urgent."

The Man from U.N.C.L.E. sighed. He had an unhappy vision of the technicolored image of Lula LaAmour vanishing as a curtain marked "business" drew across the screen.

"Yes?" he said wearily, "What is the message?"

"The caller said to inform you that the closing market in New York is decidedly unsteady."

"Thank you," Napoleon said with ill grace.

He dropped the telephone into its cradle and considered the cryptic message. He understood it. U.N.C.L.E. headquarters wanted him to call it. Thoughtfully he took a silver fountain pen from his pocket and twisted the cap. A tiny antenna shot up six inches.

"Central Control." He said into the ultra-miniature transmitter built into the fake pen.

The electronic wizardry of the tiny communications set bridged the distance to U.N.C.L.E. headquarters in New York with face-to-face clarity.

"Mr. Solo?" a slightly English accented voice said from the set.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Waverly," Solo replied to his chief's brief question.

"What is her name, Mr. Solo?" the U.N.C.L.E. chief said.

"Whose name, sir?" Napoleon answered.

"The lady whose escort for the evening I am stealing."

"You won't believe me, but is Lula LaAmour."

"The—er—buxom actress?"

"Buxom only in the right places, sir."

"Well, her type can always find a substitute escort, fortunately."

"But my type can't find a substitute for her type!"

"Fortunately, Mr. Solo," Alexander Waverly went on. "I never let my

emotions interfere with business. Do you, Mr. Solo?"

Napoleon Solo sighed.

"No, sir, I do not," Solo said sadly, "but only because you will not let me."

"An excellent observation, Mr. Solo," Waverly said. "I need you on a matter of the gravest concern. I also need Mr. Kuryakin. I suppose he has one of these actresses dated for the evening?"

"No, sir," Solo said. "He is having dinner with April Dancer."

"Then I will have three of my operatives upset for the price of two."

"Yes, sir," Napoleon said.

"I assure you, Mr. Solo, that this is a matter of the utmost importance or I would not interrupt your well earned vacation. It is so urgent that every second counts. Every second! The lives of thousands now and millions later depend upon prompt and decisive action."

"Yes, sir," Solo replied crisply. "What is the problem?"

"There is registered at the Quitandinha Hotel a man named Senor Pablo de Santos-Lopez. This man is a world reknown meteorologist and has been working in South Argentina on a revolutionary method of breaking up storms. We have a tip that this man's life is in extreme danger. Protect him at all costs."

"Yes, sir," Solo said. "Is THRUSH involved?"

"Yes," Waverly replied. "We are not sure just how, but THRUSH agents are showing an extraordinary interest in Dr. Santos-Lopez. We believe they intend to kidnap him."

"I see, sir," Solo said. "If Santos-Lopez can really break up storms, it would be an important war weapon."

"This man has been very secretive about his experiments," Waverly said. "But it stands to reason that if a man can break a storm, he may be in a fair way to discover how to start one!"

"That would really be something," Napoleon said. His face grew grave at the implications. "I believe I've read that typhoons carry the destructive fury of a thousand atomic bombs."

"That is correct, Mr. Solo," Waverly said. "A weapon like that in the hands of THRUSH could be disastrous. I do not know that there is such a weapon, mind you, but it is a chance we cannot afford to take. You see now how grave the situation is."

"Yes, sir," Napoleon Solo replied. "Illya and I will get on it at once. Is there any evidence of a direct contact between this meteorologist and THRUSH?"

"There was a conference between this man and a THRUSH agent in Buenos Aires three days ago," Waverly said. "Apparently it was not a satisfactory one. Santos-Lopez left the city under an assumed name and came to Rio. He is registered at the hotel as Senor Diego de Vega. He seems afraid, according to my information."

"We will contact him immediately," Solo said.

"Good!" Waverly said, "And Mr. Solo—"

"Yes, sir?"

"I know the producer of Miss Lula LaAmour's films. I will arrange with him to get you an autographed picture of the lady. A sort of consolation prize, shall we say!"

Solo broke off the connection ruefully. Although there was a certain amount of chagrin at losing his date with the lovely movie star, years of working with the great crime-fighting organization known as U.N.C.L.E., had made Napoleon something of a philosopher.

TWO

With Waverly the job came first, last and always. The dedicated man in the driver's seat in New York made that plain to all of them. They also knew that he demanded the same devotion to duty of himself that he asked of them.

Solo slipped into his coat and walked across the hall to Illya Kuryakin's room. He found his partner just putting on his coat. Illya was a slightly smaller man than Solo and his blond hair contrasted with Solo's dark head. The blond hair had a perpetual unruliness about it that somehow matched the look in Illya Kuryakin's eyes. His pale blue eyes stared out of his Slavic face with a hint of sadness when he caught the expression on Napoleon Solo's face.

Don't tell me," he said plaintively. "Mr. Waverly called. Mr. Waverly

said in effect that vacations are for bums. And he said—"

"A man's life is in extreme danger," Napoleon broke in. Waverly said there wasn't a second to lose."

"Have you arranged for wheels or is it within walking distance?" Illya said crisply, his manner changing to grim efficiency.

"A cab will be in front of the hotel in three minutes."

"I can make it to the lobby in two minutes flat," Illya said. "That leaves me one minute to take care of an essential matter."

He picked up the room phone and dialed room service.

"I want a hot dog," he said. "That's right. Put one on a silver platter. Deliver it to room three hundred four, occupied by a Miss April Dancer. Tell her that the 'dinner'—provided through the courtesy of Mr. Alexander Waverly—is a substitute for the pheasant under glass with caviar and champagne promised her by one Illya Kuryakin."

He grinned at Solo as he jammed down the phone. "Come on, Napoleon," he said. "Adventure calls again!"

"It's okay for you to take this lightly," Solo said with a grimace. "A date with a girl married to her job like April could not possibly be more than just a friendly evening. But Lula and I might have made some beautiful music together."

"Sure!" Illya retorted. "She would have sung you right into the movies yourself. You could dodge ersatz bullets instead of real ones."

"I don't know but what I wouldn't like that to this," Napoleon said gloomily. "There was a tone in Waverly's voice that indicated this was going to be one tough case."

"What is it?" Kuryakin asked as they hurried down the hall to the elevator.

"He hinted that THRUSH was on the track of a method to control storms. Can you imagine the havoc they could raise if they could hit us with a hurricane or typhoon at will?"

Illya Kuryakin whistled softly. He face grew more grave.

"A hurricane can do more damage to a town than a bombing," he said slowly.

"Mr. Waverly said the average typhoon packs the explosive force of a thousand atom bombs," Napoleon Solo said.

"And worse," Illya added, "the storm travels over a wide track. A directed hurricane could strike Miami in Florida and devastate the entire Atlantic coast all the way to Canada!"

"Not only the coast but inland for a hundred miles," Napoleon said hurriedly. "Imagine not one storm, but a series hitting the East Coast, the West Coast and the Gulf States simultaneously! Millions would die. The country would be paralyzed. The effect would be greater than any possible nuclear bombing by intercontinental ballistic missiles."

"It this thing is true—and Waverly should know—then THRUSH has come up with the most devastatingly terrible weapon the world has ever known."

"It looks like that is what we're faced with."

"What's our lead, if any?" Illya asked.

"A world famed meteorologist named Campos-Lopez seems to be the key to this thing. THRUSH is after him. He is staying here in Rio incognito. We are going to see him now."

At the meteorologist's hotel, a frigidly polite desk clerk informed them that the hotel never gave any information about its guests. Napoleon Solo flashed his U.N.C.L.E. identification card and the clerk's manner changed abruptly.

"I am sorry, sir," he said. "The gentleman you inquire about is registered here as Senor Diego de Vega of Argentina. He left early this morning and has not returned. I have no idea where he went."

"I see," Solo said. "It is very important that we contact him as soon as possible. If he—"

"But wait, sir! Yes, it is he! Senor de Vega is just getting out of the cab outside."

"Yes, I see him." Illya Kuryakin said. "The gray-haired man paying the cabbie."

"Come on," Napoleon said, striding rapidly across the lobby.

Illya Kuryakin frowned slightly as if hit by an uneasy hunch. His hand

reached up and touched the small automatic in the shoulder holster under his coat. He missed the super U.N.C.L.E. gun, but it was much too large to carry under the coat.

Solo went out the revolving doors just ahead of his companion.

"Dr. Campos-Lopez?" he said, extending his hand to the stooped gray-haired man who was just turning away from the cab driver.

The meteorologist jumped back against the cab. His hand jerked down to his coat pocket. Napoleon stopped short as he faced the ugly muzzle of a small gun in the hands of the frightened man.

"Don't come near me!" Dr. Campos-Lopez cried.

"Doctor! We are your friends," Napoleon said soothingly. "We are from U.N.C.L.E."

"I have no friends!" the man cried in a choked voice. "Keep away from me. Take your hands away from your pocket! Don't try to pull a gun on me. I'll kill you if you make a false move!"

"Please, doctor—" Napoleon began.

"Don't move! I'll shoot!" the frightened man warned.

The meteorologist had not seen Illya. Kuryakin moved to the side. He looked around and caught Solo's eye. Napoleon gave a short negative shake of his head. His orders from Waverly was to protect Campos-Lopez, but not to force himself upon the scientist.

The frightened man reached back and pulled open the cab door.

"Take me to the airport!" he said hurriedly. "I'll not wait for the baggage."

He slammed the door, still holding the gun on Napoleon Solo. The uneasy cab driver jerked the car, clashing the gears as he went off.

"Shall I follow him?" Illya asked.

"Yes!" Napoleon said. "Do the best you can, but don't force yourself on him. I'll contact the South American bureau of U.N.C.L.E. and get a Spanish-speaking agent to pick him up at the airport. He—"

"Napoleon!" Illya's sharp cry cut in on Solo's words.

The man from U.N.C.L.E. whirled to see a car dart from a side street just as the fleeing cab turned the first corner away from the hotel.

There was a sudden blaze of gunfire straight into the cab. The horrified men saw the cab careen wildly and plunge into a thick hedge. They started to run toward the wreck. The killers' car spun around in the road. Its headlights flashed full on the two men from U.N.C.L.E.

They split, each diving for the opposite side of the road to divide their attackers' aim.

Napoleon hit the ground, snaking his body around under the doubtful protection of a small evergreen. Across the street Illya Kuryakin took refuge behind a small rock wall. A spray of sub-machine gun bullets smashed into the rocks. Illya ducked, sprawling flat to save himself.

THREE

Across the street Napoleon Solo raised up on his knees and started shooting. He kept his aim low, hitting for the car's tires. The first bullet caught the left rear wheel.

The car swerved as the tire exploded. It plunged straight at the low wall hiding Kuryakin. Solo leaped to his feet, caught in a sudden clutch of fear as the out-of-control vehicle aimed straight at his companion.

Solo caught just the briefest glimpse of Kuryakin as Illya threw himself to one side. The car struck the stone wall, ripping the mortar loose and plunging halfway through before it came to a halt.

"Illya!" Napoleon cried running across the road. "Are you—"

"Look out, Napoleon!"

Solo could not see the cause of Kuryakin's frantic cry, but he knew his companion too well to disregard the warning. He dropped flat, hugging the street curb for what little protection he could get from it.

A gun cracked from the back of the wreck. The slug slammed into the concrete, inches from Napoleon's head. It glanced off at a screaming angle after bringing blood to the man from U.N.C.L.E.'s cheek with a chip of pavement.

Napoleon shifted slightly in order not to present the same target twice.

The shot came from the back of the wrecked car. He half raised and fired through the broken rear glass.

A bright red stab of muzzle blast showed him his mistake. The next shot came from under the wrecked car instead of inside it as he thought. The shot came so close it scraped cloth from the shoulder of Napoleon's coat.

He shot back, aiming for the spot where he saw the muzzle flash. The bullet struck metal and clanged like a bell. Napoleon, realizing their adversary had pulled back, ducked half doubled up and make a dash to the right.

The killer's gun barked again, but his fleeing quarry ducked behind the remnants of the stone wall. Napoleon moved stealthily forward, his gun ready, seeking a target.

He saw a shadow move on the opposite side of the wreck. He raised the gun, but before he could pull the trigger he heard Illya yell again. Once again he couldn't see the new danger, but he flattened against the wall.

Then he heard the roar of a car's engine and headlights cut through the darkness, throwing him into a bright glare of light. He caught just the briefest glimpse of a man's silhouette. He was leaning out the passenger's side of the car. He was holding a sub-machine gun in his hand.

ACT II: THE STRANGE STORM

It was impossible to scramble over the wrecked wall. He would run directly into the other killer's line of fire! In that moment of desperation Napoleon Solo realized that he had only two alternatives. He could crouch there and die—or he could attack!

Either one seemed like suicide, but it was better to go down swinging! He leaped to his feet, bent almost double and charged straight toward the flaring headlights.

The killer cursed loudly and tried to lean far enough out the door to bring the gun to bear on the charging man.

But as he leaned out he presented a target of his own. Solo's gun spat at him, but the jar of running spoiled his aim.

Behind the other wreck the first killer got rattled and started to shoot at Napoleon's running back. The bullet passed over Solo's head with a deadly whine and smashed into the windshield of a car facing the man from U.N.C.L.E.

The driver screamed a frantic curse and shouted for the gunman to stop before he killed the wrong targets. He shoved the car in gear and tried to ram Napoleon. But as the car started Solo leaped on the hood. He shoved his gun through the shattered windshield. The gunman frantically tried to swing his gun around.

The driver twisted the steering wheel frantically. The car swerved, throwing Napoleon on the grass. A burst of fire ripped from the killer's tommy gun, but it flashed up toward the sky as the man was thrown back by a straight shot from Illya Kuryakin's gun.

Solo twisted around. As Illya raised up to fire the shot that saved Solo's life, he made a perfect target for the first killer still crouched behind the wrecked car.

As Solo twisted he saw the man rise up. He shot from the ground, without aiming for he realized in that split second of danger that Illya's life hung by a mere thread.

He missed! He shot too fast, but there was no alternative.

The bullet struck the edge of the shattered windshield. The spray of splintered glass showered the crouching gunman. He jumped and his

aim was spoiled. The bullet intended for Kuryakin smashed into the ground at the U.N.C.L.E. agent's feet.

Solo whirled as the driver of the stalled car grabbed for the machine gun dropped by his dead companion. As the man raised up, Solo's bullet caught him between the eyes. Napoleon whirled, but it was all over. He saw Illya walking rapidly toward the slumped figure of the other THRUSH agent.

After they made sure neither of the THRUSH men were playing 'possum but were really dead, Solo said crisply, "Keep me covered just in case there's another group following them."

Illya nodded silently. He went over and switched off the car lights so they wouldn't present as good a target if another attack was made by THRUSH.

While Solo hurried over to the wrecked taxi to see what had happened to Santos-Lopez, Illya stared at the dead men. For perhaps the thousandth time in his life he wondered about them and the strange organization they served.

THRUSH! An organization so strange no one knew even what its initials stood for. Only one thing was clear about THRUSH. This was that was composed of a group of men willing and able to use criminal means to affect a dream of world conquest.

Apparently the organization was based in and received support from a certain European country, but it had never been determined that the country's government was behind the organization. Because it operated world-wide, only a world-wide crime fighting group like U.N.C.L.E. could effectively block this super-evil group.

Kuryakin took a deep breath as he considered their narrow escape. Each tangle with THRUSH was more difficult than the last. He wondered, staring at the dead men, where it all would lead.

The blare of a police siren broke his thoughts. He went down to the street to identify himself and make a report to the police. The tough manner of the police changed instantly when Illya flashed his U.N.C.L.E. identification.

He turned as Napoleon Solo came up. The man from U.N.C.L.E.'s face was grim. Illya did not have to ask him what Santos-Lopez's condition was. Solo's face told him.

"Chalk up another for THRUSH," Illya said bitterly.

"We did the best we could," Solo said slowly. "Unfortunately time was so short we had to approach Santos-Lopez direct. We should have arranged an interview with him through some third party he trusted. He would have trusted us then."

"What do we do now?" Illya asked. "This thing isn't over by any means."

"No, I'm afraid this storm expert's death only complicates what promises to be a bitter battle. I've got to report to Waverly that we failed. Why don't you help the police as much as you can? I'll call New York."

Solo walked over to the broken wall, where he could not be heard by the others. He pulled out his pen-communicator and twisted the cap to extend the aerial. His low spoken call letters were amplified and transmitted instantly to a room high in an office building in New York.

In this office a leathery faced man of indeterminate middle age leaned back in a high backed chair and thoughtfully regarded the steel and glass spire of the United Nations building visible through his window. He was thoughtfully rubbing the bowl of an unlighted briar pipe as he looked at the giant building which represented a large share of the world's hope for tomorrow.

A light flared on a small console recessed in the large mahogany desk in front of him. He turned so quickly he dropped the pipe on the thick rug. In his haste he didn't bother to pick it up. He snapped on a circuit to hear Napoleon Solo's voice identifying himself.

"Mr. Waverly? Come in, please," Solo said from South America

TWO

Alexander Waverly, Section I member and operations chief for U.N.C.L.E., hesitated just a moment to compose himself. He was a human being with a human's worries and doubts, but he tried never to present any face but a composed, confident one to his agents. His personal troubles and uncertainties remained his personal property.

He shared them with no one—not even the five other men who share with him the terrible responsibility for direction of the giant United Network Command for Law and Enforcement.

It took him but a second to compose himself and shove back his anxiety over this latest and most terrible of THRUSH's threats to the world.

"Yes, Mr. Solo," he said quietly. "Go ahead, please."

In South America the quiet, decisive voice had a soothing effect on Napoleon Solo. Regardless how tough a situation might be, he never failed to feel better about it after hearing Alexander Waverly's quiet, confident voice.

"I'm afraid we have to report a failure, sir," he said.

"What happened?" Waverly asked.

Napoleon gave him a brief but accurate sketch of what they encountered.

"Unfortunate," Waverly said slowly. "But unavoidable, I can see now. Since I called you I received a special report on Dr. Santos-Lopez from our Section IV. Just a moment."

Waverly picked up a yellow teletype sheet marked with the call code of U.N.C.L.E.'s section IV Enforcement and Communications.

"It says that Dr. Santos-Lopez was extremely suspicious of anyone," Waverly said. "Under the circumstances I doubt that we could have made direct contact with him."

"Shall we remain here and see if we can get his reports on his storm breaking experiments?" Solo asked.

"No," Waverly said. "Our South American offices will be put on that job. I want you—"

He broke off as a brilliant red light flashed on his desk console.

"One moment, Mr. Solo. Stand by. I have an emergency call."

Mr. Waverly punched in a new circuit. A hidden speaker went into action with: "Section III on report."

"Go ahead, Section III," Waverly said. "Switch to Code Line A, since I will retransmit your report to Mr. Solo on the field band."

"Yes, sir," Section III, Enforcement and Intelligence replied. "News service reports from South America are that the laboratory of Dr.

Santos-Lopez was destroyed two hours ago by fire. Another fire of unknown origin broke out in the hotel where he had been staying. It destroyed his baggage."

"Thank you," Mr. Waverly said, cutting the connection to Section III. "Did you get that report, Mr. Solo?"

"Yes, sir. I'd say it is futile to try and find any reports that Dr. Santos-Lopez might have left about his storm destroying work."

"It would seem so," the U.N.C.L.E. chief said slowly. "However, I doubt that he was far enough advanced to provide us a sure kill for any storm generating system THRUSH is working on. That threat is our immediate concern. So you and Mr. Kuryakin report to me here just as quickly as you can get here."

"Yes, sir," Solo said. "There is a regular airline flight leaving here in—"

He glanced down at his watch. "—In forty-five minutes. We can make that quicker than we can charter a special flight."

"I am sure you can," Waverly said. He picked up another piece of paper from his desk. "But there is another flight, the Inter-Hemisphere Airlines, leaving in forty minutes. I have already arranged through Section II for the blocking of two seats on it for you and Mr. Kuryakin. That cuts five minutes from your departure time. I consider five seconds wasted a tragedy. Five minutes compounds the tragedy sixty times. So you will forgive my presumptuousness in arranging a different schedule for you."

"Yes, sir," Solo said, sighing. It was impossible to get ahead of Waverly, he thought wryly.

"Excellent," Waverly said. "We have received new evidence that clearly indicates that my original presumption was correct. THRUSH is experimenting with the creation of synthetic storms—and they are succeeding! Therefore you can see why every second—every second—Mr. Solo—endangers the lives of thousands of people!"

"We'll be on the plane, sir," Napoleon said.

"I'll be expecting you," Waverly replied crisply as he cut the connection.

A police escort got them to the airport with only one of Mr. Waverly's precious seconds to spare. There wasn't even time for them to check

out of their hotel. Illya asked the chief of their police escort to inform April Dancer of their sudden departure and to request the girl from U.N.C.L.E. to take care of such details for them.

The two U.N.C.L.E. operatives were the last passengers aboard. Every other seat was taken.

"Sit down here, Illya," Solo said. "I'll take the next one."

But Kuryakin had seen the girl sitting in the window seat farther up the aisle.

"No!" he said, to Solo's surprise. "Age before beauty. You sit here."

He went up the aisle to the other empty seat. Napoleon saw the girl then and his face twisted, wryly.

Solo slipped into the other empty seat, opposite a sour-faced old man. Up the aisle he could see Illya talking with the lovely girl. From what little he could see of her, she seemed to what Alexander Waverly would describe as buxom in the—er—right places.

He sighed and leaned back in his seat. Between Illya's aggressiveness and Alexander Waverly's impatience, Solo wondered how he would ever get any romance in his life!

THREE

About thirty minutes after were airborne, the stewardess lowered the lights. The old man beside Napoleon Solo started to snore loudly. Deep breathing showed that others in the plane were also sleeping. Solo found it impossible to doze off himself. He kept thinking of THRUSH's new weapon.

He had more than the usual experience with hurricanes and typhoons. He knew that if THRUSH could harness their fantastic fury, U.N.C.L.E.'s great enemy now possessed a weapon capable of doing more damage than any weapon ever conceived.

Napoleon was thinking of the terrible devastation he'd seen only a few months ago when a typhoon hit southern Japan. Not a house remained standing in a hundred mile area.

As Napoleon recalled it, more than 2,000 people died and losses ran into the millions.

What frightened him was the thought of THRUSH-guided typhoons striking the U.S. coast in areas unused to storms of such frightful nature. Florida was constantly ripped by hurricanes. The people there knew how to batten down the hatches and ride out the blow. But what would happen if a typhoon suddenly struck the coast of Southern California, with its lath and plaster houses? Or Honolulu or Seattle or San Francisco? The destruction would be frightful.

Suddenly his thoughts were shattered by a sickening heave of the flying plane. His head flopped forward. But for the seat belt he would have been thrown across the aisle.

The plane shuddered. It was almost as if a giant hand had pushed against it and the four-motored jet was struggling to fly through the obstruction. Solo had the awful feeling that they had stopped dead in the air.

Then the left wing dipped. He was thrown heavily against the arm rest. The old man beside him neglected to fasten his seat belt. He was thrown over on top of Napoleon.

The plane fell a hundred feet and pulled up with a sickening thud. It rose like an elevator and then dropped again, snapping the necks of the frightened passengers.

Outside, a wild fury of rain beat on the windows. A vivid crack of lightning flashed through the sky, throwing a weird blue light inside the passenger compartment of the beleaguered plane. The stewardess switched on the lights to help calm the passengers.

She came down the aisle, obviously a frightened young woman but one bravely trying to hide her fear. The bucking of the plane in the super turbulent air almost threw her off her feet with each sickening heave. But she braced herself, grasping each seat back as she passed in an attempt to keep her balance.

"Please tighten your seat belts!" she cried above the noise of rain, thunder and jets. "Please be calm! There is no danger. We have just run into some turbulence. It will pass in a few minutes!"

Solo watched her in admiration, but Illya Kuryakin did not even glance in her direction. He was too busy with his lovely companion. She was neither brave nor afraid. That is what surprised him. She was furious. Her face was flushed. Her eyes flashed as vividly as the lightning outside.

"Damn them!" she cried, balling her fists and beating on the back of the seat in front of her as an outlet for her fury. "What are they trying to do to me! They should have checked to see which plane I boarded!"

Illya Kuryakin looked at her in astonishment. It seemed like a very curious time to get mad.

He put his hand over and caught her fist.

"Take it easy," he said. "Everything is going to be okay. It's just a strong front."

He raised his voice to make himself heard for the slap of rain on the metal skin of the plane was loud as hail.

But before he finished speaking there was a sudden lull between rain gusts. His loud claim that it was just a strong weather front carried halfway down the passenger compartment.

A man in the uniform of an officer in the U.S. Air Force leaned across the aisle.

"Don't kid yourself, buddy," he said to Kuryakin. "Before I went on military duty in South America I flew hurricane patrols out of Florida. This is no front. It is a genuine hurricane!"

Illya thought so too. His remark was intended to calm the furious girl beside him. Yet the weather report when they left Rio was for calm weather all the way. The meteorological reports might miss a budding storm, but this one was full-blown. Anything so large should have been discovered by hurricane hunter planes.

It was impossible for so large a storm to have gone completely undetected.

But was it?

He remembered what Napoleon told him regarding the call to Mr. Waverly.

Was this a THRUSH-made storm? That would explain its unusual sudden appearance.

Just then there was another lull in the driving rain. The former hurricane hunter across the aisle leaned over and said to Illya: "There is something very strange about this storm. I know something about

hurricanes. This thing is absolutely impossible!"

"How do you—" Illya Kuryakin began, but the full fury of the storm struck the plane again. It was impossible to be heard. He gripped the armrests of his seat as the storm-tossed plane almost went into a loop.

His stomach heaved from the furious up and down motion. He hoped that he wasn't going to disgrace himself before the girl by losing his supper.

There was another short lull between gusts of rain. He heard the officer talking to himself: "It's impossible! There couldn't be a storm like this!"

ACT III: THE STORM GIRL

The pitching of the plane grew more violent. The hard driven rain was becoming hail. The alarm of the passengers increased.

Suddenly the girl unbuckled her seat belt. She stood up, bracing herself by holding to seat in front of her.

"Just a minute!" Illya said to her. "You can't—"

"Mind your own business!" she snapped. "I know what I'm doing. That fool of a pilot is going to get us all killed. I've got to do something to keep alive!"

"All you will do is hinder the pilot," Illya said. "Everything will be all right. These men are experienced—"

"Get out of my way!" she said.

She had the look of a person who knew exactly what she was doing. She stepped over Illya's legs. The plane lurched, but she kept her feet. She started making her way down the aisle, holding to the seat backs for support.

At the end of the compartment the stewardess tried to stop her. The girl brushed on past. The plane almost rolled over. She caught the knob of the compartment door.

Illya Kuryakin unbuckled his seat belt and got up. However, the girl braced her herself in time to avoid being thrown off her feet. When the plane righted itself, she opened the door and stepped into the pilot's compartment.

Illya hesitated for a second, then went after her. The wind was becoming gusty. The plane shivered and rolled between moments of comparative calm.

The stewardess half rose from her seat by the compartment door.

"Please, sir—" she began.

Illya patted her shoulder and said, "Don't worry!"

"But you can't bother the pilot at a time like this. He needs to keep his attention on the plane."

"I'm going to get that girl out of there," Illya said. "I—"

"You are from U.N.C.L.E.," she said.

The plane twisted. Every strut and rivet groaning under the strain. Illya could imagine the pilot's struggle to bring them back to an even keel.

"How did you know that?" he asked the girl when he could get his balance again.

"That woman—the one who went in the pilot's compartment. She asked me about you when you first got on the plane. She saw you coming up the ramp and she asked me to make sure nobody took the seat beside her. She wanted one of you to sit there."

"Thanks," Illya said. "Thanks for telling me."

He went on up front, fighting constantly to keep his feet. The tossing of the plane was getting worse. It was building up to the most ferocious storm he ever encountered.

He found the girl standing between the pilot and co-pilot. Both men's uniforms were stained with sweat.

Their faces were strained and tired from the constant struggle to keep the plane from tossing over and losing lift.

"You've got to climb!" It was the girl screaming in the pilot's ear. "These storms only rise about twenty thousand feet. If you can break out of the worst circle of wind, you can rise above it!"

"I've tried!" he yelled back. "I can't gain any altitude. It's taking all our power just to keep out of the sea!"

"Then turn with the wind!" she cried. "Let it carry you—"

"Lady, let me fly the plane, will you? Now get the hell back there in your seat. You're stopping me from—"

"Can't you understand!" she screamed at him. "I know plenty about these storms. I—"

"If you don't get out of here—!" he cried.

She grabbed his arm. The plane pitched to one side. He shoved her and pulled back on the wheel with all his strength in a desperate

attempt to bring the nose up.

Illya Kuryakin caught the girl just in time to keep her from being thrown against the control panel. When the plane was half on an even keel again, the angry pilot switched to intercom and called the stewardess.

"Come up here! Get this crazy woman out of here before she wrecks us!"

"You stupid fool!" the girl cried wildly. "You'll kill us all if you don't listen to me!"

Illya braced himself as best he could, and pulled out his U.N.C.L.E. identification. He flashed it to the startled pilot.

"Better do what she says," he shouted. "I've a hunch she knows more about this thing than any of us!"

"I can't take a chance on hunches!" the pilot yelled back. "I've got a two million dollar plane and the lives of ninety people to think about!"

"Do you think we've got a chance to get out of this alive?" Illya asked. "Be honest. A lot depends on this."

"No," the pilot replied. "This is the worst storm I've ever encountered. We're continually losing altitude. Unless a miracle happens, nothing can keep us from going into the ocean!"

He wasn't a coward. Illya Kuryakin could see that. He just spoke the plain truth based on long experience as captain of an international jet.

"Then try it her way," Illya said persuasively. "Things can't get any worse."

The pilot hesitated. The reputation of the men from U.N.C.L.E. was so great that he nodded.

"I guess you're right," he said. "Things can't get much worse, no matter what we do."

"Thank you!" the girl said breathlessly to Illya. "You can stop worrying now. We'll come out okay. There's a rhythm in these things. If we turn on the pulse, we can make it into the eye."

He was amazed by her confidence. He moved back to make room for her beside the pilot. As he did, he backed into someone. He turned his

head and saw Napoleon Solo.

"I saw you rush up here," Solo said. "So I followed. What gives?"

"I don't know!" Illya said into Solo's ear. "But this girl seems to know more about storms than anyone."

"Who is she?" Napoleon asked.

There was another flash of that frightening blue lightning outside. In the brief glare Illya saw the suspicion on Solo's face as he stared at the girl's back.

"I don't know," Illya said. "But I would like to."

Solo nodded. Together they watched the girl. Her swaying body, slenderly outlined against the glow of the cockpit instrument panel, bent half doubled so she could shout her instructions into the pilot's ear.

TWO

The wild turbulence increased in fury. It was beyond anything either of the men from U.N.C.L.E. had ever experienced before. At one point it appeared that the groaning, straining plane would be torn apart. But somehow, it struggled through.

Outside another crash of lightning illuminated the cockpit with a ghostly glare. It shocked Napoleon to see how helpless the crew was now. But he was even more struck by the calm confidence of the girl.

As the plane continued to fight the wild wind and rain, the two men from U.N.C.L.E. began to realize that the girl was right. There did appear to be a rhythm to the storm's gusts.

Cleverly the girl was anticipating this stormy rhythm and informing the pilot when to make his banks.

Then suddenly the solid wall of surging clouds was gone from in front of them. The plane's tail gave one last upward loop as they left the circling winds. Then they were flying in still air.

The stars were visible above them, dimming with the approach of dawn. The sea beneath was whipped to an indescribable fury and a circling wall of clouds hemmed them in.

"We're in the eye now," the girl said calmly. "In all storms of this kind

the winds circle about a dead section of air known as the eye of the storm. This eye moves along with the hurricane."

"Thanks," the pilot said, mopping his dripping face. "You knew what you were doing. I'm sorry I doubted you, but"

"Forget it," she said crisply. "My life was at stake here too, you know."

She turned to go back to her seat. As she passed Napoleon Solo, he stopped her.

"This is quite a remarkable thing you did," he said, giving her an engaging smile. Illya noted with amusement that Solo's charm was lost on the young woman.

"How does it happen that you know so much about storms?" Solo asked.

She gave him a steady stare.

"Are you a policeman?" she asked, her voice cold and harsh.

"No," he said quickly.

"Then, until you get your badge, keep your questions to yourself!" she snapped.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I was just curious."

She brushed past him.

He turned to follow, but she slammed the compartment door in his face.

Illya chuckled. Napoleon turned to look at him.

"How many times have I told you to let me handle the pretty girls we meet up with? Girls require finesse, you know. You just confine yourself to masterminds and old ladies. Let *me* handle the young pretty ones!"

Solo gave his partner a sour look.

"Are you a betting man, Mr. Kuryakin?" he said, an edge in his voice.

"Definitely not, Mr. Solo," Illya said formally. "But on occasion I have been known to slap down a chip or two."

"Okay," Napoleon snapped. "I'll bet you a drink when we get to New York that you don't have what it takes to even get her name."

"Mr. Solo, you have yourself a bet! And no fair putting it on your expense account. This has to come out of your pocket, as punishment for doubting my romantic abilities!"

Solo smiled. "Trot back and start your pitch. I've got to call Mr. Waverly. That young lady will bear watching. I want to arrange for a shadow to pick her up when we land."

"Okay, I—" Illya began, but broke off suddenly when the pilot's compartment door opened.

THREE

The storm girl—as they came to call her—stood there looking at them. Her expression was half angry, half malicious. Obviously she had not gone to her seat, but remained against the other side of the door listening to them talk.

"And I bet both of you two drinks that neither of you get anywhere with me!" she snapped.

She slammed the door, leaving the two young men looking at each other with embarrassment.

"You made a bet," Solo said. "I'm holding you to it."

"I'll find out who she is," Illya retorted. "She has thrown me a challenge."

He went back to his seat. The girl didn't look at him as he slid into it. She kept staring out the window at the gradually lightening sky. The pilot was circling inside the eye of the hurricane, gaining altitude as he sought to fly over the storm.

Illya Kuryakin felt a curious sense of uneasiness as he stared at her lovely, but determined, profile. He had a peculiar hunch that this woman meant trouble. He couldn't put his finger on the source of his uneasiness. He did not believe her part of the THRUSH organization.

If the storm was an artificial one created to destroy him and Napoleon Solo, it seemed unlikely that a THRUSH agent as resourceful as this one would have been expended.

Then he caught himself with a start. He recalled something that had slipped his mind in the rush of events. This was the angry exclamation of the girl when the storm first broke so unexpectedly.

He shot her a narrow glance. She still had her eyes focused on the swirling clouds outlining the eye of the storm. He recalled her anger.

They should have checked to see which plane I took!"

Those had been her words; as nearly as he could recall them. At the time he thought they referred to someone who should have seen her off. Now, in view of her extraordinary knowledge of the storm, he wasn't so sure that there wasn't something more sinister behind them.

Still in the pilot's compartment, Napoleon Solo was in contact with Mr. Waverly in New York. He made a hasty report of the unusual storm.

"Yes," Waverly said. "I have just received a report from Weather Central. Everyone is dumfounded by the sudden appearance of the hurricane."

"Was it really artificial?" Napoleon asked. "It seemed like the real McCoy to us in it!"

"There is a real curious thing about this storm, Mr. Solo," Waverly replied. "It is so strange that Weather Central is flabbergasted. They can't understand it. To me that is proof positive that the storm was created."

"What is that, sir?" solo asked.

"The storm is turning in the wrong direction!"

"What?" Solo asked. "I don't understand."

"Hurricanes and typhoons are the same," Waverly said. "They are most monstrous circling storms, revolving about a calm eye. The difference is that the hurricane is in the Atlantic and the typhoon is the name given to Pacific Ocean storms. There is one other difference and that is what concerns us here."

"And that is, sir?"

"The direction of rotation of these storms are always from right to left on the north side of the equator. On the south side of the equator they

revolve from left to right."

"Ours didn't?"

"It did not. You were south of the equator when you were struck. Radar planes from the international weather service have picked up the storm on their scopes. It is circling from right to left. This is the first known case of this ever happening in the history of the weather service."

"That seems to indicate that this might be an artificial storm after all," Solo said.

"Yes," Waverly replied. "Other storms we caught which we feel may also be THRUSH tests behaved normally. The only explanation is that this storm was generated to destroy you and Mr. Kuryakin. I suspect your attempt to contact Dr. Santos-Lopez made THRUSH suspect you knew something about these experiments."

"Do we have any kind of lead as to where these things are generated, sir?" Napoleon asked. His brow creased with worry. If THRUSH had so mastered the elements that it could create a storm of such cyclonic fury, the evil organization was close to being ready to launch a stormy attack as a prelude to destroying the world's governments.

"There is only the smallest possible lead and it may prove false," Waverly said. "A sea-going yacht was spotted off the fringes of two Pacific typhoons. It may be a coincidence or it may have something to do with generating these monstrous things. We are investigating."

"There may be something else," Napoleon said. "We got out of this because of a girl—a rather odd young lady. She showed a surprising knowledge of the storm."

Waverly had his chief enforcement officer describe the girl minutely.

"Hang on a moment," he said. "I want to see what the computer has to say about anyone with that description."

Solo waited impatiently. In U.N.C.L.E. headquarters the giant computers, storing a fantastic amount of criminal and scientific data ground out Waverly's request in forty-five seconds.

"The description you gave me could fit a young woman names Lupe de Rosa," Waverly said. "Does she have a Spanish look about her?"

"Vaguely," Napoleon said. "But she does not speak with an accent."

"Miss de Rosa has no accent. She was born in California. She was a brilliant student, specializing in meteorology. A paper she wrote brought her to the attention of Dr. Santos-Lopez. She was his assistant until about eighteen months ago. She quit after a quarrel. The quarrel seems to have had something to do with her belief that she was providing all the genius in his experiments while he was taking the credit."

"That could well be this lady," Napoleon said positively.

"If so, please cultivate her," Waverly said. "She could be very important to us. She should know all of Santos-Lopez's secrets. She could be extremely important in helping destroy THRUSH's storm maker."

"Much as I hate to mention it," Napoleon said, "but you may have to call in Mark Slate. This lady is under the present impression that Illya and I are first class bums."

"Well, whatever you have done to give her that impression, undo it at once!" Waverly snapped. "I have a horrible vision of a series of those killer storms striking the United States. Our situation is desperate!"

ACT IV: VANISHING LADY

The plane kept spiraling up, circling inside the still eye of the hurricane. It was growing lighter outside by the minute. Slowly the big jet climbed above the boiling clouds, breaking out into the clear air above the storm.

Several times Illya Kuryakin tried to engage the girl in conversation. She ignored him and kept staring out the window. After about an hour of this, he got up and went back to see Napoleon Solo. The two men walked up forward, where they could talk without being overheard. Solo quickly filled him in on Waverly's hunch that the girl was the dead meteorologist's former assistant.

"That means she is probably in danger herself," Illya said.

"That is right," Napoleon replied. "And we must do a better job of taking care of her than we did her former boss."

"She has the same opinion of us that he did," Illya said wryly.

"Mr. Waverly will have some people at the airport to help us keep her under surveillance," Solo said. "She is our best lead. If THRUSH strikes at her, we must be prepared."

Illya nodded. But I wish she would say something to me," he said. "I don't expect a kind word, but she could at least curse me. Anything is better than that frigid silence."

"Try a new tack," Napoleon suggested.

"What?"

"How do I know? Am I supposed to do your romancing for you?"

"Just go back to your seat," Illya retorted. "I'll win that drink from you yet!"

When Illya slipped back in the seat beside the girl, he decided the best thing was a direct, honest approach. The girl was obviously no idiot. Her record as a meteorologist showed that she had brains to match her beauty.

"Miss de Rosa," he said. Her shoulders jerked unconsciously at the mention of her name, but she still did not look around at him. He

knew, though, from her unconscious flinch that the name struck home.

"Miss de Rosa," he repeated. "I am sure you heard just before we took off from South America that Dr. Santos-Lopez was killed."

She did not answer, but she started breathing harder. The rapid rise and fall of her breast showed clearly that what he said was having an effect upon her, even though she continued to ignore him.

"We have reason to believe that you might be in similar danger," he said. "Dr. Santos-Lopez was killed because of work you shared with him. We would like to protect you from a similar fate if we can."

She turned then and looked at him. There was an odd light in her deep dark eyes. It wasn't exactly anger, but it was partially that, plus a mixture of exasperation and amusement.

"Mr. Solo—or are you the one they call Kuryakin?"

"Illya Kuryakin, I—"

"Well, Mr. Kuryakin, I do not care to be protected by you or Mr. Solo. I am perfectly capable of taking care of myself! Perfectly capable, thank you!"

She turned to her absorbed study of the morning sky. He did not get so much as a glance from her the rest of the flight in to New York.

As they went through customs, Illya contacted Waverly and received word that two other U.N.C.L.E. agents were at the airport to help them watch over the lovely meteorologist. This made both he and Solo feel a little better.

Solo spotted both of them as they came out of customs. He joined the two men for a quick conference while Illya followed the girl out to the taxi stand.

Suddenly she turned to face him. He braced himself for another angry blast, but she fooled him.

"Mr. Solo—or is it Kuryakin?"

"Kuryakin," he explained patiently for the second time.

"Oh," she said with a smile that brightened her face and seemed to give her a new and more inviting personality. "I never could keep

names straight! I'm sorry I was so rude to you on the plane."

Illya tried to play down his startled pleasure.

"I'm afraid it was I who was rude," he said. "You had ample reason to be annoyed with me."

"Well I was annoyed. It was the first time I've ever been the object of a bet between two young men. I didn't quite know how to take it."

"I must apologize. It was extremely ill-mannered of us."

"I thought so at the time, but now that I've had time to think about it, I'm not sure but what I should have been flattered."

"Anyway, you had your revenge," Illya said with a grimace. "You caused me to lose."

"If I recall correctly, in my annoyance I made a bet with you."

"You did," he said. "You offered to bet a drink yourself that I wouldn't succeed in learning your name. But I did, didn't I?"

"Yes, and I suppose I must be a good sport and buy you one."

"Why not?" he said quickly.

"I suppose you are going down town," she replied. "Why don't we share a cab? I'm going to Park-Plaza."

"Right on my way!" Illya lied quickly. "Let me get my bag and I'll be right with you!"

He walked hurried back inside the terminal, passing Napoleon Solo who stopped just inside the door to light a cigarette.

"Watch me and learn how to get along with the girls!" Illya whispered quickly as he went past. "Park-Plaza!"

Solo gave no indication that he heard. He finished lighting the cigarette and went over to a phone booth.

Instead of dialing he removed his pen-communicator and called U.N.C.L.E. headquarters.

When he got Waverly, he said, "Illya has made contact with the lady. They are off by taxi to the Park-Plaza to have a cocktail together."

"Excellent!" Waverly said. "Tell Watson and Armat to put a stakeout on her room there. Contact the hotel management and ask their cooperation. We want a twenty-four hour watch on her. However, keep out of sight. This woman is not a criminal. We are protecting her, but we must be positive that we do nothing that can cause her to complain that her right of privacy has been invaded."

"Yes, sir," Solo said and broke the connection.

He walked back outside just as Illya was helping Lupe de Rosa into the cab. He couldn't help noticing the very friendly manner in which she smiled at Kuryakin.

TWO

In the cab Illya Kuryakin found Miss de Rosa exactly the opposite from the silent sphinx of the plane. She talked quite animatedly. On the plane she seemed angry at the world in general, but now her mood had done a one hundred eighty degree turn. He knew that she had made a phone call after leaving customs and before coming out of the terminal. He wondered if this accounted for her change of spirits.

But knowing women, he wondered how long her good humor would last. It took him twenty-two minutes to find out. It was just exactly that long after they left the airport that she said, her voice changing from its feminine chatter to a grim coldness:

"Mr. Solo—"

"I'm Kuryakin!" he said wearily.

"It makes no difference. Do you see this!"

She lifted the bag in her lap. Illya saw a tiny automatic with the barrel directed straight at him. Her finger was on the trigger and she had a business-like expression on her face. It told him she could and would pull the trigger if she had to.

He eyed the gun and quirked his eyebrows up in an exasperated quirk.

"I take it we aren't friends any more," he said.

His voice was light, but his eyes were wary. This woman had shown during the storm that she had nerves of steel.

"Don't move!" she snapped. "And don't try to signal to the car

following us!"

Illya Kuryakin leaned back, his eyes half closed, watching the girl.

"Whatever you are up to, I can be more help to you as a friend than as an enemy," he said quietly.

"I don't think so," she said. "You strike me as the kind of person who would be burdened with that most useless of things: a conscience!"

Before Illya could reply to that surprising observation, the girl leaned forward and spoke hurriedly to the cab driver.

"How much longer before those fools are going to stop the car following us?"

"Just after we come out of the tunnel," the driver said, half turning his head. "Don't worry. They'll shoot a razor dart into the car's tires. Then we'll get away before Napoleon Solo can get another cab."

"There were two men with him in the terminal. I saw him signal to them," she said hurriedly.

"Stop worrying! We know our business!" he snapped. "We'll throw them off the track and get you there."

"Mind if I smoke?" Illya said. "Looking down a gun barrel is sort of hard on the nerves."

"Shut up!" she snapped. "There's nothing you can say I want to hear!"

Suddenly the driver floorboarded the cab's accelerator. The car shot forward. Illya glanced in the rear view mirror. He saw the cab carrying Solo dropping back. Tires screeched as their own cab took a corner on two wheels.

The driver went up one block and then took another turn. There was nothing haphazard in his attempts to throw off Solo's pursuit. He drove exactly like a man who has every turn of the wheel plotted in advance.

He made two other turns and drove into the garage back of an industrial building.

"Get out!" Lupe snapped to Illya.

"You might say please!" he said, giving her an amused quirk of his lips

that definitely did not reflect his inner feelings.

She gave him an angry glance. His casual manner was beginning to worry her. She paused and looked at him sharply. Her indecision was mirrored clearly on her face.

"He's taking this too easy," she said to the fake cab driver. "Do you think there's still another car following us?"

The driver shrugged.

"You can never tell anything for sure when you're up against these U.N.C.L.E. rats," he said. "They're tricky, Lupe. Just remember that if you expect to pull this deal off."

She nervously bit her lower lip. "Don't let him kid you, lady," Illya said, twisting his own lips in a peculiar grin. "Solo and I are the Laurel and Hardy of U.N.C.L.E. Just a couple of clowns. You don't have to worry about us."

Lupe's face flared. She was goaded to the point of explosion by Illya's mockery—which was what he intended. She suddenly swung her purse at him.

His heart leaped as the purse slammed against the side of his face. It was just what he was hoping for. The blow gave him an excuse to stagger back without causing the driver to jump him. He doubled up and hit the driver's legs.

Lupe cursed, and jerked the gun around to shoot. Illya swung the startled driver and shoved him into the girl. The two hit just as she squeezed the trigger. The jar spoiled her aim. The bullet slammed into the metal cross beams overhead.

Illya caught the driver with a hard knee to the stomach. The burly man collapsed with a choking sputter.

Kuryakin twisted, trying to grab the girl before she could get to her feet.

He caught her arm as she swung the gun toward him. She jerked back, but couldn't tear loose from his desperate grip.

"Now—!" Illya Kuryakin began—and pitched forward on his face.

A tall man slipped the gun he used to pistol whip the man from

U.N.C.L.E. back in its shoulder holster. He was breathing hard and all of it was not from running to join the fight. He glared coldly at Lupe de Rosa.

"My dear," he said, his voice heavy with menace, "for all your brilliance as a scientist, you are a complete fool!"

"You can't talk to me that way!" she flared.

The man's bleak face flushed slightly. "Can't I?" he said softly. "Your work with these storms is very important to us, my dear, but in THRUSH nothing is so important as being a member of the team! There is no place in our organization for individualists. If we don't work together, U.N.C.L.E. will destroy us. Important as you are, you are worthless to us if we must treat you as a prima donna."

Lying on his face on the concrete floor, Illya Kuryakin could hear them talking. The blow, for all its savagery, had but stunned him momentarily. He half opened his eyes. He could see his assailant's feet. They were close enough that Illya thought he could upset the man. He hesitated because he could not yet place the position of the cab driver. It would be fatal to make a move now."

"And what about your end of the bargain!" Lupe flared. "You almost killed me with that damned storm!"

"We had no idea you were on the plane," he said coldly. "You should have contacted our man in Rio for instructions instead of jumping off on your own. We could have told you not to take that plane. We had already learned that Waverly himself arranged for two passenger seats to be cancelled to make room for Solo and Kuryakin."

"Santos-Lopez tried to treat me like a slave!" she cried. "I don't intend to exchange one slave master for another. I don't have to account to you for every minute of my time."

"You saw what happens when you don't!" he snapped. "You almost got yourself killed. And now you almost made a mess of things by trying to shoot Kuryakin. Can't you understand? Murder must be handled with finesse in this town—especially murder of an U.N.C.L.E. agent."

"He tried to—"

"You were under my surveillance every second. He did not have a chance in the world of harming you," the tall man said impatiently. "I am not going to argue. This is your last chance. Play by THRUSH

rules, or you may not play at all!"

"Are you threatening *me!*"

"Call it what you will!"

"I want to talk to Mr. Leach about this! We'll see what he has to say."

"Mr. Leach works for me. He does what I tell him. And you will be expected to do the same!"

Ilyya Kuryakin couldn't see the girl's face, but knowing her, he was sure that she was furious. It gave him a thrill of anticipation. He was sure now that the girl's resentment of THRUSH's regimentation could be used to his advantage.

He slowly reached his hand around where he could pull his pen-communicator from his pocket. While the man and Lupe were arguing he surreptitiously twisted the cap. The antenna shot up six inches. He pulled the tiny communications set down against his body where it would not be seen, but where it could pick up and pass to U.N.C.L.E. headquarters the incriminating conversation between the girl and her THRUSH boss.

But the only thing he was able to transmit was his own gasp of pain! A heavy boot caught him in the ribs. He doubled up with a groan. The same foot that kicked him ground a heel down on the communicator.

"What is it?" the THRUSH man cried, whirling about.

"He was trying to sneak a fast one, boss," the cab driver said. "Look here!"

"Did he get anything transmitted?" the man asked in alarm.

"I don't know. I don't think so."

"In this business you can't afford to think!" the man rasped. "We've got to get moving!"

"Get this rat into another cab. Get a driver who is expendable. Place some article of Lupe's in the seat beside Kuryakin. Then arrange a wreck. You understand?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Martin," the driver said hurriedly.

"Good! Don't leave anything to chance. Be sure Kuryakin and the

driver are dead. Have a prepared witness to tell the police what happened. Arrange a story that will look as if the girl was kidnaped and the two men killed by a South American revolutionary group who want the girl's knowledge of storms to help their revolution. Be sure THRUSH is not connected in any way."

Illya only dimly heard the man, Martin, reading his death warrant. He groaned and tried to sit up. Something like volcanic fire burst in his head as he took another savage kick. This time it was against his temple.

He pitched forward on his face.

Martin smiled down at his limp body.

"You see," he said. "The men from U.N.C.L.E. aren't at all the supermen some of our faint-hearted members seem to think. They are just human. They can be hurt and defeated, just as any other human can!"

He laughed softly and turned to the girl.

"You see, Lupe," he said, "you did not make a mistake agreeing to work with THRUSH. Nothing stands between us and total victory except U.N.C.L.E. and you see how we deal decisively with that organization!"

ACT V: "SO LONG, LUPE!"

When their cab's left rear tire started bumping, Napoleon Solo grabbed his pen-communicator.

He quickly transmitted his identification and added, "Mr. Waverly! Emergency!"

"Go ahead, Mr. Solo."

Alexander Waverly's quiet, confident tone was a direct contrast to Solo's clipped anxious voice."

"One moment, sir," Napoleon said. He turned to the two men with him. "Get out quickly! Try to thumb a ride from anyone who will stop for you. See if you can spot where that cab went with Illya and the girl!"

Then into the transmitter, he said hurriedly, "They're getting away from us, sir. The girl suddenly had a change of character and got chummy with Illya. I think now it was a trick. I think she's leading him into a trap."

"What can we do here to help you, Mr. Solo?" Waverly asked.

"I'd like an all-points alarm put out for this cab. You have the number. I phoned it in from the airport. I suspect it is not a regular cab driver. Possibly the cab was stolen. Also I'd like the tri-angular magnetic locators manned. Illya may get a chance to open his communicator. If so, we can get a fix on their location from it."

"Very good, Mr. Solo," Waverly said. "Within five minutes every policeman and every cab driver in New York will be alerted to watch for this car and its passengers."

"Thank you, sir," Napoleon said. "I'll leave my pen-communicator open so you can contact me instantly as well as keep abreast of all our developments."

"Excellent, Mr. Solo," the U.N.C.L.E. chief said. "I do not understand your statement that Miss de Rosa led Mr. Kuryakin into a trap. Isn't it possible that THRUSH agents trapped both her and Mr. Kuryakin? After all, she was Santos-Lopez's assistant in his storm breaking activities."

"Yes, sir," Napoleon replied. "But it seems to me she had a definite change of character after she made a phone call on landing. Call it a hunch if you wish, but I don't believe she is a victim of THRUSH. I believe she is part of THRUSH."

"Mr. Solo, I personally would never rely on a hunch," Mr. Waverly said severely. "I must have something concrete and definite upon which to base my actions."

"Yes, sir," Solo replied.

"However, that is my personal feeling about my actions," Waverly went on. "I am also aware that on at least three notable occasions your hunches kept us from total defeat. So I am not going to stop you from following any hunch you may have, Mr. Solo."

"Thank you," Napoleon said. "I'll keep you informed, sir."

Traffic was partially stalled behind the stopped cab. Solo looked down the line for a likely car to commandeer. He hit on a hot rod driven by two teenagers as the most likely to give him cooperation. Although an international law enforcement group, he had no power to commandeer a vehicle as the New York City police could do. He could only request.

However, he found the two boys not only willing but absolutely eager to help when he flashed his U.N.C.L.E. identification.

"Gee!" one of the said. "Wait until I tell my girl I'm a genuine man from U.N.C.L.E.!"

"You won't be a man until you're twenty-one," his companion said.

"Just help me pull this off and I'll tell her for you that you're every inch a man and a big one at that!" Napoleon said.

"Hang on, Unk!" the boy cried. He must have been all of sixteen. "Awwaaaay we go!"

He took off with a spin of screeching rubber that almost threw Napoleon out of the topless car. They took the corner on two wheels.

"Where to now, Unk?" he yelled back over his shoulder at Napoleon.

"Take a left," Napoleon said, after the slightest hesitation.

"That's a dead end. It leads right down to the river," the other boy

said.

"Then make a right," Solo replied. "Another hunch gone wrong. Just keep cruising up one street and down another. It's anybody's guess where the cab went. We—"

The open circuit on the pen communicator in his jacket pocket crackled into life.

"This is Waverly. We have a report. No cabs cross the bridge. They must be holed up somewhere in your neighborhood. We have another report that they did not go back toward the airport. I'm sending seven police cars out to ring in the area. I— Wait!"

Listening tensely to the micro-speaker hidden in the fake fountain pen, Napoleon motioned for the driver to stop. Both boys leaned back, fascinated by the tiny communications set.

"Waverly again!" the speaker crackled into life. "Evidently Mr. Kuryakin managed to get his pen-communicator into action for the briefest second!"

"Did we get sufficient reception to do any good?"

"They must have caught him just as he opened the circuit," Waverly said.

His voice still sounded calm to the unpracticed ear, but Solo knew his chief so well he could detect the thin note of anxiety under the outwardly steady voice. In a man with Waverly's self control this was about the same as sheer panic in another's voice.

It told Napoleon Solo how desperate their chief thought Illya's situation was.

"All we got was a gasp of pain from somebody, an angry shout from another, and the briefest snatch of voices in the background but blurred by the louder noises close to the microphone."

"Can the scrambler—" Napoleon began.

"We are working on it," Waverly said crisply. "Also we hope to get a tri-angular fix on the radio reception. There is a bare chance that the directional beam finder can work on so small a reception if we set up the microphone and keep repeating the reception signal. Stay where you are. I'll call you back as the scrambler starts feeding us data. I

should have a preliminary report in three minutes."

"Yes, sir," Napoleon said crisply. "We'll stand by."

TWO

A car swung around the corner, its lights flashing on them. Napoleon Solo whispered an urgent order for the two boys to duck. He drew his gun from its shoulder holster.

Then he relaxed as he recognized the man leaning out the back window. It was one of the two U.N.C.L.E. agents who had joined them at the airport. Napoleon motioned for him to stop.

"Aw gee!" the younger of the two boys said in a disgusted voice. "No shooting!"

"Relax!" Napoleon said grimly. "You'll get shot at quicker than you need to be!"

He hurried over to the other car for quick conference. He sketched briefly for his co-agent what Waverly transmitted to them.

"That broken cry on the pen-communicator sounds like Illya got it," the other U.N.C.L.E. man said, his voice grim.

"Don't bet on it," Napoleon said, his voice growing harsh to hide his own grave concern. "Illya's lives can run any cat competition."

"Okay," the other man said. "I'll pull down to the intersection. That way, if we flush them out, we'll be set up where one or the other of us can take off instantly without having to turn around."

Napoleon nodded and went back to the boys in the hot rod.

"What's this scrambler thing?" they asked him, referring to the mysterious reference Mr. Waverly made in his transmission.

"The short reception U.N.C.L.E. headquarters got from Illya Kuryakin was recorded as all calls to headquarters are," Napoleon explained hurriedly. "The scrambler is an electronic means of separating the voices and rerecording each alone."

"Then you can tell what each said?"

"Yes," the man from U.N.C.L.E. replied, "but the big question here is how much was received. It might not be enough to do any good."

"Then—!"

"Wait! I'm getting a call from headquarters!"

Napoleon Solo pulled out his transmitter.

"Yes, Mr. Waverly?" he said.

"The first scrambler report is in," Waverly said crisply. "We converted the words unscrambled into oscillograph impulses and compared them with oscillograph voiceprints we have on record. The cry of pain came from Mr. Kuryakin. The curse of the man who evidently struck him is from a known THRUSH agent named Paul Wicker. We are working on the two voices in the background. That is all right now."

"Gee!" said the younger boy, his eyes big. "What's a voiceprint?"

"Everybody's voice has certain tones, just like your fingers have certain print marks," Napoleon explained. "When samples of voices are changed to lines on an electronic oscilloscope these tones show up as distinct marks which can be compared with records. It is as infallible as fingerprints for identification."

Before the boy could reply, Waverly called again. "The computers were successful in unscrambling the voices in the background. One of the voices is that of Lupe de Rosa. The other is Maxwell Martin. This man is a minor Wall Street stock broker, but we have good reason to suspect that he is an important THRUSH executive in New York."

"Was there enough of their conversation to give us any clue?" Napoleon asked.

"They were discussing the elimination of Mr. Kuryakin through a fake accident. That is all we could get.

The directional finders were unable to get a fix on Kuryakin's transmission."

"What does that mean?" one of the boys asked Napoleon after the Man from U.N.C.L.E. broke the connection with Waverly.

"It means these people are planning to murder their captive. We know they are somewhere in this area, but have no idea where to start looking. You boys know this neighborhood. Where would you go if you wanted a quick hideout?"

"There are some warehouses back on Fourteenth Street near the river," one of the boys said. "The company that owns them shut down about two weeks ago."

"But they have a watchman there," his companion objected. "I know. We tried to get in and he run us off."

"But THRUSH could have bribed the watchman to provide them a quick place to duck into. Apparently this thing was well planed in advance," Napoleon said. "Where is this place?"

"Hang on, Unk!" the youthful driver cried. "Awaay we go!"

Rubber screeched on the pavement and the car shot forward. The hot rod careened around the corner on two wheels in a way that made Napoleon Solo wonder dismally if he wasn't in more danger from the driver than he was from THRUSH.

The car shot down along a railroad track and made another short right. The warehouses loomed dead ahead. The driver braked sharply.

"Do you want to go inside?" he asked.

The man from U.N.C.L.E. shook his head.

"They would spot the car," he said. "Park along the fence. Douse your lights when you drive up. I'll walk in."

"We'll go with you!" the driver said eagerly.

Napoleon hesitated. He knew it was too dangerous for the boys to accompany him. Yet he was reluctant to tell them no after all the help he got from them. He was trying to think of some excuse to send them somewhere else, somewhere they would not be in danger but would feel that they were contributing.

Before he could make a decision, he saw a car move around the corner of the warehouse. It was just after dark, too dark to be driving without lights, but there wasn't the sign of a glimmer from the cab. A bigger car came right behind it. It also had its lights completely switched off.

"Look!" he said hurriedly to the boys. "I can't wait. Take this!"

He shoved the pen-communicator in their hands. "Just talk in the mouthpiece here where this tiny hole is. Tell Mr. Waverly what is going on. Tell him to call all our people and have them surround this

area."

"We want to go with you!" the boy cried.

"This is more important," Napoleon said hurriedly. "There are too many for us to handle with only one gun between us. Now get me some help quickly—or a man's life may be lost!"

"Sure thing, Unk!" the boy cried. "Hey, Uncle. Hey, Uncle!"

This last cry was made into the pen-communicator. Napoleon winced as he jumped from the car and ran into the darkness. He could just imagine Alexander Waverly's startled anger at the boy's irreverent cry. But he had no choice.

He could not permit the boys to rush into certain death. He knew that they would follow him regardless of any orders unless he gave them something to do.

THREE

Napoleon bent low and ran along the side of the fence. The cab was moving slowly in order not to attract attention. Solo came to the gate. The truck gate was closed, but there was a small personnel gate open. Just beyond it was a guard shack.

Napoleon moved closer, hugging the fence. He could see the shadowy figure of the guard standing in front of the shack. The small personnel gate was ajar, but when Napoleon pushed on it, the un-oiled hinges squeaked.

The guard whirled. Napoleon saw the silhouette of the gun in his hand.

"Who's there?" the guard said in a harsh voice.

"Quick!" Solo cried. It didn't take much acting ability to put a lot of agitation in his voice. "Where are they? There isn't a second to lose. Those rats from U.N.C.L.E. are on to us!"

"What!" the guard cried. "Mr. Martin told me this was perfectly safe when I agreed to let them use this place. I don't want to get in any trouble!"

Napoleon Solo hesitated, wondering if he could trust the man to help him. He decided it was too much of a risk.

"Come here," he said.

When the guard walked closer, Napoleon's hand flashed up and hit him against the temple with the butt of the gun. Solo caught the guard as he fell. He pulled the man into the shack. Then he turned and scooped up the fallen man's gun. He shoved it into his coat pocket.

The two cars were coming closer. The driver of the cab stuck his head out and snarled, "Hurry up and get that gate open! We haven't any time to lose!"

"Okay. Keep your shirt on!" Napoleon replied in a muffled voice. "I'm coming as fast as I can."

He shuffled across the road, imitating the guard's dragging walk. He pulled open the gate and started to swing it back. Then before the driver could put the cab in gear, Solo leaped forward. He swung the gun in a vicious blow.

The driver squalled and tried to duck. The blow caught him on the side of the head. He slumped over the wheel. Solo whirled. The big limousine behind stopped with a squeal of brakes. The darkness was split with the red stab of muzzle blast. A bullet just missed Solo. It struck the car fender and carreened off with a deadly whine.

Solo dropped flat on the pavement to present as small a target as possible. He jerked up his own gun, but the trigger stuck. The blow he struck the driver had broken the trigger spring.

He twisted frantically, rolling back under the stalled cab. It was a moment of extreme danger. If the driver recovered and started the car, he would be run over.

He dug in his pocket for the guard's gun. It was a bigger, heavier .45 caliber. Solo's own gun was a snubnosed .38, carried because its smaller size would fit more unobtrusively under his coat. He wished desperately he had the supremely accurate U.N.C.L.E. gun, but its bulk prevented it being carried on the person.

He pulled himself up against the left rear wheel. The driver of the limousine and his woman companion did not try to escape by driving away. That made Solo suspect that Illya was a prisoner in the cab.

This supposition was borne out when he heard the man yell at the girl: "Hurry! The shots will bring the police in a few minutes! Take this package of gas tablets! I'll keep that U.N.C.L.E. rat pinned down!"

Throw one of these pellets in the back of the cab. Suffocate our prisoner. He may have heard too much and can incriminate me. We've got to remove him."

"Okay!" the girl gasped. "How do I use them?"

"They're glass. Just throw one inside. Hurry! We haven't a second to lose!"

The two split, coming on opposite sides of the car. Napoleon groaned. There was no way he could cover both sides of the car. He tried to move toward the side the girl was approaching, but a bullet ripped the air at his ear. He whirled and fired back, but his shot went wild.

He whirled. He saw the girl's ankles. It was all of her he could see of her from his position under the car. He realized then that he made a tactical error in climbing under it. He would have been better off taking his chances in the open. That way he could have maneuvered. Now he was completely pinned down!

He tried to draw a bead on Lupe's ankles, hoping he could knock her off her feet before she could hurl the suffocating gas in on top of Illya Kuryakin.

But she moved too quickly. The right wheel got between them. He tried to snake his body around for a better shot, knowing that he was exposing himself to a deadly shot from the gun of Maxwell Martin. It was a chance he had to take. Otherwise his U.N.C.L.E. partner would die!

As he turned he saw the girl stagger back. He couldn't understand what hit her. Maxwell Martin also was so startled that he whirled to face this new danger without shooting at the exposed Napoleon Solo.

Solo, suddenly suspecting the truth, ignored the girl. He whirled and fired at Martin. The THRUSH man staggered, falling with a wailing cry.

Solo rolled the rest of the way from under the cab. He saw Lupe stagger to her feet. She was holding a handkerchief to her nose. A greenish phosphorescent cloud was swirling about her. In her fall she broke the suffocating gas bulb.

Solo took a deep breath and held it as he whirled to aid his companion in the back of the cab. The cab door was open. Kuryakin lay on the floor. It was obvious to Napoleon what had happened.

Although bound, Illya managed to pull down the door handle to open the door, but keeping it pulled closed. Then, when the girl approached to drop the gas pellets inside, he kicked the unlatched door with his bound feet. The unexpected blow knocked her back and down against the pavement.

The extreme danger was not over. The gas cloud was a terrible threat to the bound man. Illya sat up. Napoleon gasped out a quick order for his partner to hold his breath.

He grabbed Kuryakin about the middle, pulling him from the cab. Then, swinging his co-agent up over his shoulder in a fireman's carry, Solo staggered back away from the poisonous green cloud.

He dropped Illya beside the guard shack. Kuryakin was bound hand and foot. He had a gag in his mouth. Solo jerked out the gag and cut the bonds on Illya's wrist.

"You can get out of the rest," he said hurriedly. "I'm going after Lupe. She's getting away!"

"Let her go!" Illya gasped. "If she's free, there may be a chance we can follow her to the THRUSH cell operating this storm gimmick."

"You're right," Napoleon said. "I'll shadow her. Are you in shape to come along?"

"Get moving!" Illya snapped. "Don't waste time on me. I'll be right behind you!"

But before Solo could leave, one of the hot rod boys yelled from the gate: "We got her! We got her! Hey, Mr. Uncle! We got the woman who was running away!"

"Who's that?" Illya asked, getting to his feet after cutting his leg bonds.

"Two boys helping me," he said exasperated. "They are *too* much help!"

"Yell for them to let her go!"

"No," Napoleon replied. "We'll have to think of some way to let her escape. Otherwise she will know we released her just to follow her to THRUSH headquarters."

Illya rubbed his wrists. He said wryly, "You can always get more than enough help when you don't need it any more!"

"Oh, don't start blaming the boys. They thought they were being helpful. And they were helpful. It was their idea that you might be here. Otherwise we might not have found you in time."

"Then I change my mind," Kuryakin said with a grin. "There is hope for the younger generation!"

"And I'd say there is hope for the older generation to muddle through while we have kids like these to help us!" Napoleon said with a grin. "I'm going to ask Mr. Waverly to write them an official U.N.C.L.E. letter of commendation. I'll mean a lot to them."

"And I want to add my thanks at the bottom," Illya said. "I was in one tough spot."

ACT VI: WATERLOO?

After thanking the boys for their help, Napoleon Solo promised them they would be receiving an official letter from Mr. Waverly. Then he and Illya Kuryakin took Lupe into the dead Maxwell Martin's car.

Solo made quite a show of holding the gun on the girl to keep her from escaping. She looked at it and shuddered.

"M-must you point that terrible thing at me?" she said.

Solo smiled.

"I'm sure you aren't tough enough to overpower both of us," he said.

He slipped the .38 special into his pocket. This was his own gun, the one he had fouled when he struck the guard and the cab driver. The .45 he took from the guard was passed to Illya, who slipped in the front to drive the car.

"Please!" Lupe said breathlessly. "Things are not the way they seem. I know it seems to your Mr. Solo—"

"Kuryakin," Illya said wearily.

"—Mr. Kuryakin that I was aiding Mr. Martin," she went on. "But it isn't true. You see, I knew what they did to Dr. Santos-Lopez. I had to play along with them to protect myself. I was just trying to find out how they are able to generate these terrible storms. Then I intended to call the police."

"I hope your story checks out, Miss de Rosa," Napoleon said. "Of course that is outside our department."

She leaned breathlessly close to him. In the front seat Illya watched her performance with a cynical eye.

"But you believe me, don't you?" she whispered.

Her hand touched his arm in a pleading manner.

Illya Kuryakin watching in the rear view mirror, smiled cynically as her hand dropped suddenly, grabbing the unworkable gun from Solo's pocket.

She jumped back against the opposite side of the car, shakily pointing

the gun in a wavering arc that included both Kuryakin in the front seat and solo across from her.

"Stop the car!" she snapped.

Illya braked to a stop. Watching her closely, Napoleon wondered if they were doing right in letting her get away.

"Get out of the car!" she snapped to both men. "Get out or I'll shoot."

Solo hesitated, but Kuryakin said, "Come on, Napoleon. You've met your Waterloo!"

"What's that? What's that?" the girl cried in a strangled voice. "How did you know—"

She broke off. "Move faster!" she said through clinched teeth. "I haven't got time to fool with you now!"

The two men stepped down to the curb. They stared after the car as she sped off. Napoleon looked at Illya in surprise.

"What brought on that last outburst?" he asked.

"You got me," Kuryakin said. "Apparently she has a phobia about the word Waterloo. I don't know why she should be bothered by it. If I recall correctly, that was where another Napoleon took his worst defeat. The word should bother you, not her."

"Remember this letting her go was your idea," Solo said. "I'm beginning to wonder if she is safe to let run around. For my money she is a genuine kook."

"I don't know," Illya said thoughtfully. "I just hope those two keep her in sight."

"They're good men, both of them. They caught my signal as she pulled away. They'll do as good a job sticking to her as we could. Better, perhaps. She knows us and they are strangers to her—I hope."

"What do we do now?" Illya asked.

"I'll call Mr. Waverly."

He tuned in the pen-communicator and reported their actions to the U.N.C.L.E. chief. Waverly gave them instant approval of their gambit in permitting the Storm Girl to "escape."

"Mr. Kuryakin is right," Waverly said. "We have no lead to the THRUSH cell operating this storm generator. This girl should be able to lead us to them."

"I hope so," Napoleon said. "But I keep remembering the cool, smart way that girl reacted when it looked like our plane was going down in that hurricane. She has brains and courage. We must not underestimate her."

"I agree, Mr. Solo." Alexander Waverly's calm voice said.

"And, sir—" Illya put in.

"Yes, Mr. Kuryakin?"

"Does the word 'Waterloo,' in connection with this case, mean anything to you, sir?"

Just the faintest note of surprise broke the calmness of the U.N.C.L.E. chief's voice. "As a matter of fact, Mr. Kuryakin, it does!"

"What is it, Mr. Waverly?" Solo put in. "Illya mentioned the name as a pun on my own name. This girl, Lupe de Rosa, seemed quite disturbed by it."

"I fancy she might well be," Waverly said. "Let the New York unit keep track of Miss de Rosa. You gentlemen report to me here as U.N.C.L.E. headquarters as rapidly as possible! Our situation is growing more grave by the second. It is far worse than when I spoke to you at the airport. We have received additional information that indicates THRUSH is ready to strike!"

TWO

After they broke their connection with Waverly, the two men from U.N.C.L.E. walked soberly to the main intersection, where they stopped at a drugstore to phone for a taxi.

Neither of the spoke much on the drive over to Manhattan. They were both deep in thought most of the time, trying to piece together the puzzling series of facts they faced these last twenty-four hours.

They dismissed the taxi in the lower fifties and headed in a fast walk back toward the United Nations building towering darkly against the night sky by the East River.

But instead of continuing on, they made a sharp turn and walked past a whitestone building in the middle of the long block.

A tailor shop was still open in the basement. Solo said to his friend, "We look a sight. We'd better get a press before we report to the boss."

Illya Kuryakin nodded. The two turned and went down the short flight of steps. Solo pushed open the door marked "*Del Floria—Tailor*" and the two went in. A little man past middle age rubbed his hands on his tailor's apron and nodded to the two.

The two men walked to the back of the shop. They entered a small dressing room and let the curtain drop behind them. They paused for a moment while a cleverly concealed electronic eye scanned them. Then the back of the dressing room wall swung in. Napoleon and Illya stepped out of the old world tailor shop into a modern, well appointed reception office.

A smiling girl at the desk asked them to place their hands on a frosted glass on her desk. She pressed a button and their prints were electronically verified from master records in the banks of computers jammed in the long steel corridors of the ultra-modern offices hidden behind the prosaic whitestone front.

Only after a verification signal from the identifications computer buzzed on her desk, did the admissions clerk give each of the two men a peculiarly shaped triangular badge to pin to their lapel. Electronic scanners would instantly sound an alarm if anyone not wearing the U.N.C.L.E. badge tried to enter any of the hundreds of top secret rooms in the headquarters.

They walked down the gleaming hall to an elevator. They took it to a top floor, walking across to a door whose oak appearance was a clever lamination. It was actually solid steel.

Solo pressed a recessed button beside the door. There was a faint buzz inside, as scanners checked their identity. The door slid noiselessly into its recess.

Across the room Alexander Waverly sat behind a desk that was in reality an elaborate communications console. At a flick of any of the rainbow colored buttons he could put himself in contact with any of the world-wide network of U.N.C.L.E. operatives.

He was watching a TV screen set in the desk. He did not look up, but said, "This will interest you. It is the aftermath of the storm that

almost got you!"

Waverly pressed a button. The picture was transferred from his private screen to a giant one revealed in the opposite end of the room as the wall rolled back in obedience to his electronic command.

"This is the Bahamas after this freak storm struck it," Waverly said, motioning toward the screen.

The two men saw what appeared to be view of an island from a low flying airplane. The island was a wreck. Docks were smashed. Boats were driven as much as a half mile inland. Palms were stripped and houses were smashed like kindling wood. As far as the eye could see there was death and destruction.

"We can expect a similar disaster along the entire Pacific and Atlantic coasts," Mr. Waverly said. "I have been discussing the possibilities with meteorologists. They tell me that if a series of storms as ferocious as this one struck at strategic points about the world, it would bring the entire earth's governments to a standstill."

"Do we have any indication of THRUSH's intentions, sir?" Solo asked as the screen went dark. He and Illya Kuryakin turned to face the grim faced man behind the communications console desk.

Waverly thoughtfully rubbed the bowl of an unlighted pipe against the sleeve of his tweed jacket.

"Yes," he said slowly. "Our sources within THRUSH informs us that the plan is to throw a chain of these monstrous disturbances at the United States, Europe, and Asia. England, France, the Netherlands, the Mediterranean countries, India and Japan are expected to take the worst of the strike. All the storms will hit simultaneously."

Solo said, his face mirroring the horror he felt, "We can expect two *billion* people to die. That is more than have died in all the wars ever fought since the beginning of history!"

Waverly got up suddenly and strode to the large window. He stood for a long moment staring out over the lights of Manhattan. He whirled to face his two agents.

"Gentlemen, I am not sure you realize fully what this can mean. You feel that these steel and concrete monsters our architects have raised can withstand the fury of any storm.

"You are right. They can. But if twenty storms the strength of this latest one were to strike twenty separate spots about the globe at the same time, it would lash the seven seas into such a fury that tidal waves would be monstrous.

"Typhoons and hurricanes are ocean storms. That many simultaneous cyclones would pile up tidal waves so high water would pour through these man-made canyons to a height of twenty feet at least!"

"Don't we have any leads?" Illya asked, the edge in his voice mirroring his growing desperation. "What do our—sources in THRUSH tell us."

"Only that the cyclonic weapons is being handled by a special cell. Nobody can tell us where or how it operates," Waverly said in a resigned voice. "This girl, Lupe de Rosa, is our only solid lead. And it is possible we may have another very slender one in—the *Waterloo*."

"What is the *Waterloo*?" Napoleon asked.

"It is a ship—a private sea-going yacht," the U.N.C.L.E. chief said. "We do not know for sure that it is connected with these storms, but it was observed on the fringes of two which sprung up unexpectedly in the Pacific. It is possible that this ship was directing the storm's movement. We are not sure, however."

"Could we ask the Coast Guard to stop and inspect it?"

"It is not registered under the flag of any country with which we have official contact," Waverly said. "To board this ship without permission of the country involved is piracy under the laws of the high seas. You will recall that the American War of Eighteen Hundred and Twelve was fought over the principle of one country inspecting the ships of another."

"Have we contacted this country for permission?"

"Yes—and was refused."

"Is this the same country where THRUSH headquarters is located?"

"Yes!"

"Then that would indicated definite grounds for your suspicions," Solo said.

"It does. Therefore, Mr. Napoleon Solo, your next job is to find out

what is happening on the *Waterloo*."

He turned to Illya. "Mr. Kuryakin, your job is to follow this girl who knows so much about storms. It is my supposition that she will eventually contact the *Waterloo*. At this point you will team with Mr. Solo to fight a new Battle of Waterloo. At that time we will have at your disposal the entire resources of U.N.C.L.E. This threat is that important."

"Very well, sir," Solo said, getting up.

"The *Waterloo* last made port in Honolulu," Waverly said. "I suggest your start there. See if you can pick up any information that might have been inadvertently dropped by any member of its crew."

"With his luck," Illya said with a grimace, "he'll run into a grass-skirted hula girl who has all the information. While I'll be tangling with a girl who goes around hitting me on the head with a gun—when she isn't trying to shoot me!"

A red light flashed on the emergency circuit on Alexander Waverly's desk.

"Yes? Waverly here."

The two men saw their chief's face grow bleak. Waverly hunched forward in his chair. His hands clinched momentarily into white-knuckled fists before he got command of himself. Then he leaned back in his chair, once more the human machine who directed the world's greatest crime fighting organization.

Solo and Kuryakin waited tensely. On emergency calls the first call came on a secret earphone monitor so that no one could hear except the chief himself.

Waverly, after his first review, touched a switch which opened the circuit to a loud speaker so his two top men could hear.

"How could something like that possibly happen?" Waverly said.

"She just outsmarted us, is all I can say, sir," the unhappy reporting voice said. "We followed her to Manhattan. She registered at the hotel and then went to a late movie. We followed her inside. She went to the ladies room on the mezzanine floor and did not come out."

"So?" Waverly said.

"We got the janitoress to investigate for us. Apparently Miss de Rosa climbed out the window which the theater staff uses to change the billing."

"At this time of night there are not many people on the streets," Waverly said. "A pretty girl like her would certainly attract attention walking alone. Call in all the assistance you need. We must find her!"

"Well, she didn't go on the street," the agent said, his voice sounding even more unhappy. "She came back into the theater and went into the ladies room on the ground floor. There we found her dress and the broken tooth of a comb. From this we surmise that she changed clothes and altered her hairdo. It is quite possible she walked right past us without any of us being aware of it."

Waverly leaned back and sighed.

"There goes our best lead!" he said bitterly. "If the *Waterloo* lead frizzles out, we really are in a fix!"

ACT VII: GIRL IN THE DARK

For the next five minutes, Alexander Waverly sat hunched over his control panel, issuing a string of orders that diverted the world-wide facilities of U.N.C.L.E. to cope with this new emergency.

Every international airline office was covered, both in the United States and abroad. A complete physical description of the girl was transmitted. Each operative had orders to get a voice sample of any woman who outwardly resembled the fugitive in the slightest manner. This was to be transmitted immediately to U.N.C.L.E. headquarters, where it would be transcribed into a voiceprint for comparison with the master prints of Lupe de Rosa's voice.

In the meantime teams of investigators tried to track down any person who may have seen a woman leaving the Broadway theater at about one in the morning.

Dozens of leads turned up and were proven false. Hundreds of voice prints poured into U.N.C.L.E. headquarters. In no case did the jagged oscillograph lines match those on file of Lupe de Rosa.

Both Solo and Illya were anxious to join the search, but Waverly insisted on keeping them with him. Then after an hour he sent them down to the headquarters dormitory to get some rest. Because of the excitement and urgency, both had difficulty getting asleep. They had just managed to drop off when Waverly summoned them again.

They found the U.N.C.L.E. chief standing at the window looking out over the dawning skyline of the city. He turned when they entered.

"We have not been successful," Waverly said, coming back and seating himself at the console desk. "That leaves us only one alternative. We must proceed according to the law of probabilities."

Illya grimaced. To him this reliance on mechanical computers to analyze a situation and give a probable answer based on the evidence was little better than a hunch. Although he had seen it work many times, he was never fully convinced that they would not sooner or later come to disaster by relying on what he called "the might-to-be."

Waverly caught the twist of the little man's face.

"Do you have a better suggestion, Mr. Kuryakin?" he asked.

"No, sir, not at the moment," Illya said.

"Then proceeding on the probabilities is better than not proceeding, isn't it?" Waverly asked.

"Yes, sir," Illya said, but his voice still held an element of doubt.

"Well, I have had all the known facts about this synthetic storm affair fed into the computers. This includes all the data we have on what appears to have been THRUSH's tests, all the information and rumors we have picked up from our spy sources within THRUSH, and all known information on Miss de Rosa. We also fed in what little we know about the *Waterloo*."

"And the answer, sir?" Napoleon asked. He had much more faith in the law of probabilities than his friend.

"The computer indicates that there has been more activity in the Atlantic than in the Pacific. This indicates that THRUSH has not been as successful in breeding typhoons as they have in originating hurricanes. They are the same, of course, except one originates in a different section of the globe. This trouble may arise from some climatic condition in the Pacific which is giving THRUSH trouble.

"The computer then gives us the probability that THRUSH will shift its full operations to the Pacific to solve this problem. It is essential to any storm-weapon plan that THRUSH be able to strike simultaneously all over the world. The probability also is that Miss de Rosa will go immediately to join the *Waterloo*."

"Is there any indication what this girl's role is exactly?" Solo asked.

"None," Waverly said. "As Santos-Lopez's assistant, she presumably knows a lot about his work in destroying storms."

He got up and faced his two top agents. "Gentlemen, you will leave for Honolulu immediately. I'll expect a report from you from there at three this afternoon."

"Three!" Illya said. "That's impossible. The—"

"Mr. Kuryakin!" Waverly said severely, "Impossible is a perfectly good word for anyone except an employee of U.N.C.L.E.!"

"Yes, sir!" Illya said.

Waverly extended his hand, first to one of the men and then to the other.

"Good-by—and good luck!"

In the hall Illya said to Solo, "You're the brains of this team. How do we get to Honolulu by three? By taking a helicopter to Kennedy International Airport we can just make connections on a jet to San Francisco. But what do we do there? I'm familiar with the schedules on Honolulu flights. We'll have a two hour layover in Frisco."

"Don't hand me your problems!" Napoleon retorted. "You are supposed to make the 'difference,' aren't you?"

"It's your problem as well as mine!"

"Is it?" Napoleon said with a smile. "It seems to me that Mr. Waverly told you to report at three. He said nothing about me."

In San Francisco the two men from U.N.C.L.E. went directly to the airline ticket counter to check their reservations for the first flight out to Hawaii.

"I'm sorry," the young lady behind the counter said, "but your reservations were cancelled from New York."

"When Waverly pulls a joke to relieve the tension, he doesn't know when to stop," Illya complained. "What do we do now?"

"Exercise your ingenuity, as Waverly would say. Don't worry me with your problems. You have to make the three o'clock report."

"I don't—"

"Are you Mr. Kuryakin?"

Illya turned. A young man in the uniform of a technical sergeant in the U.S. Air Force was at his elbow.

"Yes," Illya said brightening. "And which general are you?"

He smiled. "You're early by a few years. It takes a while to become a general. We are holding a plane for you. A Mr. Waverly, who really must be some big shot to arrange this, made a request through the department of defense for us to wait for you."

Illya Kuryakin looked crossly over at Napoleon Solo, who grinned

back.

"He could have told us and saved me a lot of worry," he said.

"Just Waverly's idea of a joke. A tension reliever, you know!"

"Well, I didn't have any tension until he started that report-by-three stuff. You know Waverly never says anything even as a joke unless he means it. When he said report by three, he meant it."

"Let's not keep the sergeant waiting," Napoleon said.

They followed the airman out to an Air Force jet bomber. They learned from the pilot that it had been in the States for installation of weather equipment. It and the crew were being transferred to Hawaii to fly weather reconnaissance.

"Are you what they call hurricane hunters?" Illya asked.

"No," the pilot said. "Hawaii is outside the typhoon belt. Our job will be chart air masses below Hawaii and off the usual line of air traffic. Airline planes send back sufficient weather reports along their route, but we'll be covering an area where there is practically no air traffic."

"Why do that?" Illya asked.

"Several storms apparently popped up unexpectedly in that area recently," the pilot said. "Nobody knows why. We are supposed to look into it. Probably some freak atmospheric condition."

"Probably," Solo said and looked at his companion.

TWO

On the flight over to Honolulu, both men spent all their time with the crew's weather observer. By the time the weather plane's wheels touched down at Honolulu International Airport, they both had a thorough working knowledge of typhoons and tropical storms.

It was exactly three when they walked into the terminal at the air base. Illya Kuryakin stepped into a phone booth for cover and used his communicator to send a report of their arrival to Waverly in New York.

"Excellent," the U.N.C.L.E. chief said. "I have additional information for you. We have just received a fix on the *Waterloo*. It is just above the equator in the central Pacific. Apparently it is heading toward

either the Ellice Islands or the Gilberts. However, the Pacific in this area is studded with tiny atolls, many inhabited by natives and many barren."

"Then the ship could be headed for some secret THRUSH station on one of these tiny islands," Illya said.

"It is possible. Arrangements have been made for the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Air Force to step up their weather flights into this area. Although there are no storms reported in the vicinity of the *Waterloo*, we want to keep a close eye on the ship's activity."

Illya gave Napoleon a terse summary of Waverly's report. Solo grunted.

"Well, I guess this is where the trail forks, as they say in those Western movies on the TV late show," he said. "I've got to hunt for a ship while you get to trail a pretty girl. It's obvious which of us Waverly is partial to!"

Illya Kuryakin grinned. "He just recognizes talent when he sees it," he said. "He knows what each of us does best."

The two men met the next evening to compare notes. Illya reported a complete blank on the girl. He found evidence that four separate women who might have been her landed at Honolulu International Airport. Two checked out to be vacationing school teachers. One left by another flight to Bali, while the fourth apparently disappeared.

"If it were me, I'd forget the disappearing dame," Solo said. "I'd check out those two school teachers. This is October. It's a peculiar time for school teachers to be vacationing."

"I did," Illya Kuryakin said ruefully. "One turned out to be a private detective chasing an errant husband. The other is a disguised woman reporter chasing the same story but for a different reason."

"Oh!" Solo said.

"See, what did I tell you? Leave the woman to me."

"Apparently so," Solo said sadly. He had just smiled at a pretty girl in a trim airline stewardess uniform and gotten a frosty stare. "Chasin 'shes' with stately lines and sails doesn't seem to be in my line either. All I can learn is that the *Waterloo* put in here a month ago for refueling. The crew was exceptionally close-mouthed. I've been unable to find

anyone who has any idea what the ship is up to."

"Well, tomorrow's another day," Illya said. "I'm going to check the steamship lines in the morning. We get in such a habit of flying we forget there are ships. This stormy kid could have taken a boat."

"Boy!" Napoleon said with mock admiration. "Are you smart!"

Suddenly Illya leaned forward. They were seated on a lanai ringed with flickering luau torches. He shaded his eyes with his hand to keep the light out of his eyes. Solo turned to see what his companion was staring at. The lanai with its thatched palm roof fronted on Waikiki's Kalakaua Avenue. All he could see was the rear view of a shapely woman going away from them.

"Don't be so obvious in your girl watching, chum," he said reprovngly.

"There's something decidedly familiar! I'll be back as soon as I get a closer look at her."

"Maybe," Solo said cynically.

"Pay the check for me, will you?" Illya flung back over his shoulder.

"So *that's* it!" Solo said, smiling, as he leaned across the clipped hibiscus hedge to watch Kuryakin follow the girl.

His eyes narrowed thoughtfully. For all his banter, he had more than the average respect for his partner's ability. He did not himself get as good a look at the girl as Kuryakin had. Like any good investigator seeking for a missing person, he did not expect to find them looking just their pictures.

But certain things cannot be disguised. Hairdos can be altered. The shape of lips changed by curving lipsticks slightly. Different types of clothing can alter the outward appearances of personality. However, basic bodily shapes are difficult to alter. The way a person walks. The tilt of the head. And a hundred more little mannerisms are more tell-tale than the obvious features.

When Solo leaned out to look down the street the girl was out of sight. He glimpsed the back of Kuryakin just vanishing into the darkness. Solo grunted and started to turn back when his attention was arrested by the shadowy shape of two men who stepped out on the sidewalk behind Kuryakin.

Napoleon hesitated for a fraction of a second. The sudden appearance of the two men did not necessarily have a sinister meaning, but deep inside one of his famous hunches was nudging him into action.

"When you deal with THRUSH it is better to be safe than sorry," he muttered.

He motioned to the waitress, who glided up with a sway of her hips under the grass skirt which was more tourist than genuine Hawaiian. She smiled brightly.

"I wish I had time to enjoy that smile," he said with a sad grin. "But I got to run. Is this enough to cover the bill?"

He handed her a twenty.

"And enough to leave a tip that will make you more than welcome any time you want to come back!" she said, her scarlet lips smiling out of her tanned face.

"I hoped I'd be welcome for some other reason," he said and closed his eye in a sly wink.

Her smile broadened.

"You will be!" she said.

She sighed when he jumped over the hibiscus hedge to the street and strode rapidly away without a backward look.

Solo followed the two men for a couple of blocks. They kept their distance behind Kuryakin. Napoleon could not tell for sure if they were following his partner.

They left the more brightly lighted section of Waikiki and the girl cut across Kalakaua Avenue at Fort DeRussy, the Army's Waikiki rest center. Kuryakin, after a pause to make sure she did not see him, crossed over behind her. The two men continued down on the east side of the street.

Solo shrugged and turned back, sure now that they were not following Illya. But in the middle of the block he glanced back. The two shadowy figure were crossing now. Solo stopped, his heart starting to beat rapidly. He could not see either Kuryakin or the girl.

Apparently the two shadows waited until Illya was out of sight before

crossing. This marked them as professionals who knew how to divert attention.

Napoleon reached for the gun in his shoulder holster. He slipped it in his jacket pocket and kept his hand on the butt and his finger on the trigger.

He hurried after the shadowy figures. He caught just a glimpse of them turning up a side street toward the beach. In the distance he could see a beach hotel.

The two men cut suddenly down a path running across a small park to the right of the street. It was obvious to Napoleon Solo that they intended to flank Kuryakin.

He started after them. They were out of sight behind a thick stand of ornamental bamboo. He advanced cautiously.

There was always the possibility that they had spotted him following them.

But when he came around the bend he saw one of the men just disappearing around another turn in the park path. He started forward in a half run. As he did another figure stepped from behind the bole of a huge palm. A shaft of bright tropic moon streaming through the rustling palms overhead clearly outlined the gun in his hand.

Solo jerked his own automatic from his pocket. But he was too slow. Before he could shoot the shadowy figure pulled his own trigger.

There was no loud report, only a muffled snapping whine. The tiny, needlelike projectile the gun fired struck Solo in the shoulder. He felt a sudden spreading numbness that flashed through his body with lightning speed.

He tried to shoot, but his arm was paralyzed. The gun dropped from his nerveless fingers. He tried to shout a warning to Kuryakin. His tongue froze in his mouth. He tried to run. His knees collapsed. He fell forward, hitting the grass.

The paralyzing shot apparently only affected the motor nerves. Solo did not lose consciousness. He heard quick footsteps of the other man returning.

Then a sneering voice said, "I thought you said these U.N.C.L.E. rats were tough!"

"Don't underestimate them, Taro. Watch them every second. They are tricky."

"They won't put anything over me!" the heavy voice of the man addressed as Taro said.

"I'm giving it to you straight, Taro," the other THRUSH man said impatiently. "Don't get over-confident. The only U.N.C.L.E. man you can count on is a dead one!"

"Well, in just a little while that is how you can describe this punk!"

He laughed—a cold, sneering chuckle.

THREE

"Get in the car!" Taro said. "When Horton gets the other one, I'll dump 'em both in the Ala Wai Canal!"

"Be sure you make it look like an accident," the other THRUSH man said. "Things are too shaky right now to risk getting the Honolulu police mixed up in this mess. They're not open to bribery."

"I know my business!" Taro snapped. "When I do a job it's done right."

"Okay, but work fast. That paralyzing serum only holds for a short time. It has to be that way so none of it will show in any autopsies after a victim is found dead."

"Just get me the other punk," Taro said. "Then I promise you it will be over in fifteen minutes."

"Horton is a good man. He'll have the other one here in a minute."

There was no more conversation between the two. They pulled Napoleon Solo back behind the clump of bamboo. He lay there trying to figure what had happened. He was sure that he had not been followed himself. Also he never detected either of the men he was trailing looking back. Yet he had run directly into a trap. It was hard to explain.

Shortly a car pulled up at the curb behind them.

"Horton?" Taro asked.

"Get a move on. I got the other one!" a heavy voice said from the car.

The two men picked up Napoleon and rushed him into the car. He was propped up in the backseat beside an equally paralyzed Illya Kuryakin.

"Okay, you two take care of them," the THRUSH man said, turning the murder over to Horton and Taro. "I've got to get Lupe and get her on the seaplane out of here. Things worked out great. I'll file a report to THRUSH headquarters on what a great job you boys did."

"Thanks, chief!" Horton said. "I thought for a minute it wasn't going to work. Lupe paraded past that sidewalk restaurant twice before that jerk from U.N.C.L.E. was bright enough to spot her."

"Yeah," Taro put in. "And I thought for a minute the other one wasn't going to have brains enough to follow him. I thought I would have to go in and poison his salad!"

"There's no time for talking. Get moving," the THRUSH cell chief said. "And don't waste too much time. That serum wears off fast, but don't worry if they move a little. It will be at least another fifteen minutes before either can use his limbs enough to pose a threat."

"Should we tie 'em up?" Taro asked.

"No, I don't want any rope burns on their wrists. It must look like an accident with absolutely nothing suspicious about their being corpses."

"Okay, so long, chief; we'll—"

"Wait!" the cell chief said hurriedly. "I almost forgot something. Frisk them. These U.N.C.L.E. rats carry all sorts of cute gadgets like rings with hidden knockout needles, little balls of tear gas, chewing gum that explodes, mints that turn into fire bombs, and all sorts of trick devices. Unload their pockets."

"We'll have this thing over before they come to enough to use anything like that," Horton said confidently.

"I know," his boss replied, "but THRUSH laboratories are always interested in what new gadgets the competition has come up with."

They quickly turned out both men's pockets. The miniature tape recorder shaped like a package of cigarettes, the pen-communicator, the ring with its hidden needle for dispensing knockout potions, and the lighter that doubled as a cutting torch, all went into the THRUSH cell chief's pocket.

"Turn on the dome light," Taro said. "Maybe he's got something we didn't get."

"Don't!" the cell chief cautioned. "We can't afford to attract attention. Feel for them."

"Hey! Here's something in Kuryakin's lapel. It's like a lapel button, but there's a tiny bulb on the back!"

A thin hope Napoleon Solo retained crumbled when Taro made that discovery. He had hoped they would overlook that hidden reserve of pressurized tear gas.

He braced himself, desperately trying to force his paralyzed arms up to crush the bulb before Taro could work it out of the lapel. Sweat broke out on his face from the violence of his struggle, but couldn't do more than barely twitch his fingers. He could slightly contract the muscles of his arms, but lacked the power to raise them.

He was sitting upright next to Kuryakin. He suspected that his partner was undergoing an equally desperate attempt to break the paralysis.

Suddenly he switched tactics. He stiffened every workable muscle in his body. He threw everything into a last desperate attempt to move. He did not try to lift his hands any longer. He knew now that this was impossible.

Instead he put every desperate contraction of his sluggish muscles in an attempt to throw his body off balance.

It wasn't too difficult. Kuryakin seemed to realize what he was attempting to do. Illya moved slightly away. With the two bodies not supporting each other so well, Napoleon was able to fall forward.

His head hit against the hand of Taro as the murderous THRUSH agent pulled away the tear gas bulb from Solo's lapel. The blow pushed Taro's fingers down hard against the U.N.C.L.E. protective device. The thin container crushed.

Solo closed his eyes tight as the blinding flood of supercompressed tear gas burst through Taro's fingers. The three THRUSH men jumped back, but it was too late. They fell, choking and crying, too blinded to see.

Both Solo and Illya closed their eyes tightly in preparation for the rush of irritating gases, but even so the highly penetrable material set their

eyes streaming with blinding tears.

Solo hunched over, his chin hanging over the back of the front seat. Tears streamed down his face. His body racked with choking coughs.

But despite his painful predicament, his mind was still working sharply. He tried to raise his arms again. He still could do no more than barely move them. He tried to speak to Kuryakin, but his tongue would not move. He shifted his feet and got the slightest movement.

It was true that the effects of the THRUSH numbing injection was wearing off, but he was certain now it would come too late. Even though the soft trade winds dispersed the tear gas, the effect once it entered the eyes would last for about fifteen minutes.

That meant that the THRUSH men would regain their faculties before he and Illya could hope to beat off the paralysis.

There was always a hope that someone would pass, see them and call the police. However, he knew it was a slim one. This section of the park was carefully chosen by the THRUSH men because it was deserted at night.

It was only a short distance to Kalakaua, the Broadway of Waikiki, but for all the good it did them, the street might have been a mile away.

In the background he could hear the THRUSH men coughing and retching. He knew that he had to find some way to call attention to their plight before the nauseating tear gas wore off. The tool for that lay just two feet from his head, but he couldn't move two inches.

He tensed, waiting for a spasm of coughing to pass and then threw his full will into a desperate effort to move.

When this supreme trial failed, he relaxed. His chin fell down over the back curve of the front seat. For a while he huddled there, coughing, eyes streaming and fighting the struggle of his stomach to throw up.

At the same time, he tried to estimate the passing time. It was impossible. Time dragged so slowly for the desperate man that each ticking second moved like an hour.

He waited until he estimated another five minutes had passed. He tensed. His body shivered with his intense struggle to raise his hand. His teeth gritted. Sweat poured from his face. Slowly his hands moved two inches. His feet shifted slightly.

He relaxed, taking fresh courage from the movement. The paralysis was wearing off, but so slowly he doubted it would come fast enough to save them. He strained again, striving with all his strength to force his body. Already he was coughing less, proving that the tear gas was wearing off faster than the paralysis serum.

He tried to estimate the passage of time by the old photographer's system of counting seconds by saying, "One-thousand-and-one, one-thousand-and-two—"

He waited then for another five minutes before throwing all his depleted strength into one more final attempt to move. He knew this was his last chance.

This time he braced his legs, trying to heave his body up. It moved slightly. He managed to get his dragging arms over the back of the front seat. He pulled with his arms and pushed hard with his legs.

But his body shook. It inched up slightly, but his trembling legs lacked the force to push him up. He hung there, taking all his strength to maintain his balance. There was none left to push himself up any higher.

Grimly he hung on to the slight gain he had made. Even though he knew he had lost, he refused to let himself fall back. The relentless determination that had carried him through desperate situations before refused to quit even when he knew it was useless to struggle any longer.

Then he felt a weight against his shoulder. He realized it was Illya Kuryakin. His partner seemed to realize what he was doing. He tried to speak to him, but his racking coughs from the special U.N.C.L.E. gas choked his voice.

But he didn't need to speak. Kuryakin understood what he was attempting. He needed no instructions.

Weakly pushing himself partly up, Illya got his shoulder under Solo's armpit. For a breathless moment the two men remained there, gathering strength for the final push that could mean the difference between life and death.

For a brief moment they hesitated. Then Solo's muscles tensed again. Illya felt it and shoved with his feet, putting all his slowly returning strength into a push to help Napoleon.

Solo's legs shook under the strain of heaving his body up. For one nearly fatal moment he thought he was going to fall, but with agonizing slowness he kept moving with Kuryakin's help.

But his rising body reached the overbalance point and he fell forward over the back of the front seat. His head hit the steering wheel with a crack that momentarily dazed him.

Then gasping, choking, he forced his head into a slight shift to the left. It touched the horn button. He pressed his head down harder.

The blast of the horn cut through the soft tropic night, loud, insistent, never stopping!

The effort, plus the hard blow he took on the head when he fell forward in his desperate attempt to hit the horn, was too much for him. His senses reeled. He lost consciousness, but the weight of his body kept the horns screeching out its wild appeal for help.

When he regained consciousness he was in an ambulance. All his frantic appeals that he was not injured, only deathly tired, had no affect on the attendants. They refused to release him.

At the hospital the doctors were equally adamant. He had to call New York and get Waverly to call the surgeon of the U.S. Public Health Service before the stubborn doctor would release his prerogative of deciding when a patient was well or not.

Even then the doctor, a short little man with bristly hair and the manner of an indignant bulldog, was furious.

Following their release from the hospital, Illya and Napoleon held a hasty conference at their Waikiki hotel.

The three THRUSH men were in the Honolulu jail, but neither would talk. On their own the two men from U.N.C.L.E. might have injected the prisoners with truth serum, but since they were in the hands of the civilian police, this was impossible. The U.S. constitutional guarantee against self-incrimination held true even when the knowledge hidden could mean the destruction of half a dozen of the world's governments.

Lupe de Rosa had vanished. All attempts to find her in Honolulu were fruitless. Late on the second day Illya picked up her trail, but it proved too late. He traced her to Hilo on the "Big Island" and from there she took a chartered seaplane for Maui, but never arrived.

Back checking they discovered the seaplane landed in Honolulu instead. A general alarm was put out for the pilot. Honolulu and the entire island of Oahu were combed for both him and the girl. Absolutely no trace of either were found.

Solo checked back on the pilot's record, utilizing Army service records, FBI facilities and the international records of Interpol and U.N.C.L.E.

"This man is clean," he said in a discouraged voice when he and Illya held their next conference. "There is absolutely no evidence to connect him with THRUSH or any other criminal organization. He was a good family man, an ardent supporter of the church and active in civic affairs."

"Then that means he is probably dead," Illya said. "Lupe or some other THRUSH agent hired the plane. After it flew her to a secret destination, the pilot returned here and was silenced."

"But where did she go?" Napoleon asked irritably. "She didn't leave by plane, by boat or by outrigger!"

"Maybe she swam!" Illya said.

Napoleon gave him a sour look. "It may be closer to the truth than you realized."

He turned to the telephone on the table beside the sitting room couch. He dialed jerkily and sat staring moodily out across the vista of Waikiki visible through the hotel window.

"Colonel Davis, please," he said into the phone when his call was completed. "Colonel? Napoleon Solo here. Did the okay come from Washington to cooperate with Mr. Kuryakin and me? Good! There is something most important. The Islands defense system has means of checking on any submarine penetration of this area?"

When Colonel Davis replied in the affirmative, Napoleon asked, "Would your defense patrols intercept any such undersea craft?"

"No," the army defense chief said. "Not unless it penetrated within the three mile territorial limits of Hawaii. We would mark its position and aerial patrols and antisubmarine units of the Navy would keep close watch over it just in case it might be a defense threat."

"Was one reported out around Maui yesterday?"

"There was," the colonel said.

"I see," Napoleon said. "Was the sea calm enough that a light seaplane might have landed on the water and made contact with this submarine?"

"Oh, entirely possible," the defense chief said. "Our patrols observed no such action, but when they arrived the submarine was submerged and departing."

"Do you have any indication of the sub's identity?"

"No," the colonel said. "These things happen all the time, both here, along the U.S. Pacific Coast and on the Atlantic. Foreign countries do it to test our defenses. We do the same thing in Asia and Europe. That is not unusual. However, if someone from Hawaii joined the sub, then that is not usual. We would be very much interested in a report of that to our counter-intelligence."

"As soon as I have anything definite, colonel," Napoleon said, "I'll certainly make a full report. Thanks for your help."

He hung up and turned to Illya. "Well, wise guy, you are right for once. She swam off—in a tin fish!"

"To join the *Waterloo*, more than likely," Illya said. "Am I permitted to venture a small guess?"

"Don't waste time telling me she is probably going to the *Waterloo* to help solve the problem of why storm generation is not as successful in the Pacific as it was in the Atlantic," Napoleon said. "I'm smart too."

"While you're being so smart," Illya said with a sour grin, "go on and tell me how you intend to keep this *Waterloo* ship from being the *Waterloo* of us both?"

"I intend to depend on your brilliance," Napoleon said with a grin of his own. "You are the difference, you know. And that is an order directly from Waverly himself!"

"I wish I could," Illya said. "Never have I felt so useless on any case. We are getting absolutely nowhere, Napoleon."

"Don't I know it!" Solo said with a worried frown creasing his forehead. "I was talking to Waverly just a half hour ago. He reports there is excitement all through the THRUSH organization. Harmon

reports it from Europe. April Dancer sent a similar report from South America. Mark Slate had the same story from Southeast Asia. Waverly believes THRUSH has definite hope that the girl will solve the problem. They believe it so strongly that they have alerted their cells worldwide to be ready to step in when these monstrous storms spread their destruction!"

"I don't know what we are doing wasting more time here," Illya said. "We've got to find a new lead. I think—"

He broke off when the phone rang. Napoleon, who was nearest, picked up the instrument. Illya, tensely watching his partner's face, saw Napoleon start.

"What is it?" Illya asked eagerly.

"A typhoon has been spotted outside the usual belt!" Solo said hurriedly. Then into the phone he said, "How is the storm reacting?"

He listened for a few seconds and said, "We certainly would! We'll be there as soon as a taxi can get us there!"

He jammed down the phone. "The storm acts as though it's crippled!" he said to Illya. "It builds up fury and then seems to lose its punch and then builds up again. It is sort of pulsing!"

"This could be it!" Illya said, his face flushing with excitement. "What are we going to do?"

"We are going to ride one of the typhoon-tracker planes out and see for ourselves!"

"Typhoon trackers? Those are the boys who deliberately fly into these cyclones to measure wind velocity and direction, isn't it?"

"That's right," Napoleon said. "We're going to go straight into that storm and we're not coming out without its secrets!"

ACT VIII: INTO THE STORM

An hour later Solo and Kuryakin were in a weather reconnaissance plane of the U.S. Air Force, heading into the deep Pacific out of Honolulu.

Another weather reconnaissance plane was already in the area which was east of Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands. The two men listened to the reports coming back.

"It is a small storm," the report said. "It covers about two hundred and fifty miles in radius. We managed to penetrate into the eye. It covers an area of about fifteen miles. There is a wall of clouds circling about the eye which holds the worst turbulence I have ever encountered. I am estimating the wind speed at close to two hundred knots—and that is *some* wind. The hail, rain and lightning is awful. There are times when I didn't think we would make it. Under no circumstances do I recommend you to try a penetration yourself."

The pilot called Napoleon Solo on the intercom.

"We are under your orders," he said. "We were told to do as you wished. Shall we try to penetrate the storm or not?"

Napoleon hesitated.

"What do you recommend?" he asked.

"It is getting close to night," he said. "I don't know what we could find out inside the eye that the other weather plane didn't get."

"Can you get him on the radio?" Solo asked. "Ask if he saw any indication of a ship in the eye."

"No," the answer came back across the intervening miles. "The ocean inside the eye is lashed to an awful fury. A fish would get seasick in that wild water. I don't see how any ship could keep afloat if trapped in there."

Illya Kuryakin nodded.

"You remember, Napoleon," he said. "When we were in the eye of that Atlantic hurricane, the trapped sea water inside the eye was boiling while the air above was perfectly still."

"What about on the fringes outside the circular area of the storm itself?" Solo asked. "Can you get any radar return that shows a ship or submarine might be anywhere along the fringes?"

"No," the reply came back, "but the only reading we can get is the side we are on. There could be a ship on the other side, but our radar will not penetrate the entire storm area. We get a bounce-back off the clouds, you know."

"Okay," Napoleon said, making a fast decision. "The plane out there now must come back. Its fuel is getting low. I think we should go on, even though it is getting dark. We won't try to penetrate the storm itself. But I want to circle as much of the total storm area as possible. I'm sure the *Waterloo* is somewhere in the area."

"And if it isn't?" Illya asked.

"Then this is a real storm and not one of THRUSH's hellish experiments," Napoleon said grimly. "That will mean returning to Hawaii and starting all over again."

"There isn't time to start again," Illya said. "Time is running out on us, Napoleon."

"I know it," Solo said grimly. "Those world-wide reports of THRUSH activity shows they expect the climax to come very soon. It makes me shudder, Illya, when I think of the millions of lives that may be lost."

"It makes me shudder even more," Illya said soberly, "when I think how little we have to go on to save those lives."

"All we can do is keep trying—trying right up to the end."

The plane droned on across the wide Pacific. The sun dropped lower. Clouds started to thicken on the horizon. The slanting light of the dropping sun set them ablaze with fiery color.

The turbulence of the air increased as they started to circle the fringes of the storm.

The plane flew on, its weather radar beam scanning storm and sea. An hour passed. It was twilight, with only a few minutes of visibility left. The radar was still seeking some sign of the *Waterloo*.

It had grown too dark to see anything on the water by human eyesight. Napoleon and Illya left their scanners' positions and went

forward to watch the radar screen over the operator's shoulder.

They watched the blips come and go on the greenly glowing screen. Once they thought they saw something, but it proved to be a whale. Another time the radar scope picked up an object, but they were never able to identify it.

Then the operator pointed out a new blip echoing from the water.

"Probably that whale again," he said.

"He's in for a tough swim if he doesn't get away from that storm," Illya said, recalling the wild froth whipped up inside the eye.

"No," the operator said. "Most of the sea agitation is along the surface. If you drop in a submarine, say, a hundred or so feet below the water, you would never know there was a storm overhead."

Napoleon and Solo looked at each other. "Then that sub which picked up the girl could have gone under the storm to make the rendezvous with the *Waterloo*," Illya said.

"I think this is it," Solo said grimly.

Napoleon Solo nodded. He called the pilot on the intercom. "I'd like to go down as low as possible and investigate this whale."

"It's going to be rougher down there," the pilot warned. "Hold on tight."

The huge four-motored weather plane circled, losing altitude. True to the pilot's prediction, it became increasingly rough as the plane descended.

"What is the 'whale' doing?" Illya asked. To him the glowing radar screen was a mystery.

"I've lost him," the operator said. "You see, radar beams reflect off clouds and rain masses. "We can't see anything behind them."

"I thought the Air Force uses radar to bomb through clouds," Solo said.

"Yes, but we're weather observers," the operator replied. "If we used beams that would go right through clouds like X-ray, it would do us no good. We are trying to find out about clouds and their shapes."

"I see," Solo said and he sounded discouraged. "Do you—"

"Wait! I've got something! It just came out of that rain squall mass here on the top of the scope. It's—yes, it's a boat of some kind. Just a minute. I can give you its length. It's about sixty-five feet long and—Hey, maybe that isn't a whale after all. It's making contact with the boat!"

Solo's heart leaped. "It is the sub that picked up Rosa," he said to Illya. "This is it, my friend!"

"What are we going to do? I'm for calling Waverly and getting the U.S. Navy submarines to sink both the *Waterloo* and the sub."

"And get them in international difficulties?" Solo asked. "We have no positive proof that the *Waterloo* is engaged in directing storms. All we have are suspicions. We could never get any official action on the basis of what we have."

"Then it is up to us to take unofficial action," Kuryakin said. "I don't think it would be any breach of international maritime law to go down for a close look at the ship. We could claim we thought it might be in danger from the storm."

"That sounds good to me," Napoleon said. "Solo to pilot, over! Can we go down for a close look at those ships?"

"Roger," the pilot said. "Hold on tight. It is going to be some roller coaster ride."

He put the big plane in a steep bank and started to descend. As they dropped, the two men from U.N.C.L.E. saw details of the sea. The waves were piling up. Their whitecaps were snatched away by the hard wind.

"It must be pretty important for those two vessels to meet to risk docking with each other in this wind," the pilot said.

"I imagine it is," Illya replied.

Suddenly the wind faltered, came back with a hard gust and then almost died.

"That has been going on since the blame thing was sighted," the ship's weather observer said to Solo. "It is what makes this storm so unusual. It seems to have trouble keeping going."

"Good!" Napoleon said crisply. "It will give us a break to get a close

look at that rendezvous."

The plane came down only a couple of hundred feet above the water. Despite the fall of the wind the waves were still high and angry.

They faced a sudden rain squall. The plane plunged into it. Rain drummed on the windows. A sudden gust of wind caused the airplane to lurch. Then the wind died to almost nothing. They came out of the rain with the mysterious ship dead ahead. There was no sign of the submarine in the gloom, but the radar scope showed it slightly submerged and departing.

Napoleon was at the scanner's window, trying to focus a pair of binoculars he borrowed from the pilot. The plane was bouncing so badly he could not get a clear enough view in the gloom to pick out the vessel's name on the bow.

Suddenly the plane gave a savage lurch that almost tore loose Solo's grip. In spite of himself his shoulder hit the side of the plane with a hard jolt.

The pilot suddenly applied full power. The straining plane shuddered as it struggled for altitude. A wing dipped dangerously. For one startled moment Napoleon Solo thought they were falling into a side slip. But slowly the pilot brought his craft under control again.

"Hang on!" he called grimly over the intercom. "They're shooting at us!"

Then as the plane circled, struggling for altitude, Napoleon saw an explosion just off their right wing. It was a savage burst of fire and smoke, reminding him of a 75mm shell burst.

The plane shuddered again. Napoleon did not have to wait for the pilot's report to know they were hit. For a moment they lost altitude, but then began to climb with agonizing slowness.

Another shell ripped through the fuselage. It exploded in the radio compartment. Illya and Napoleon rushed forward. The radio operator was dead. The radio equipment was a shambles. Even the plane's intercom was out.

Napoleon stepped through into the pilot's cockpit. He was staggered by what he saw. Another shell had ripped away part of the windshield. Rain and wind was slashing through the broken hole. The co-pilot was slumped over his controls, unconscious. Blood was

streaming down the pilot's face.

He turned his agonized eyes on Solo.

"I c-an't keep her up! Help me!"

With Illya's help, Napoleon pulled the unconscious co-pilot out of the way and slipped into the seat himself. Acting on the choked instructions of the man in the other seat, Solo helped him fight to keep the plane under control.

"Right rudder! R-right rudder!" the pilot cried.

Solo jammed the right rudder control down with all his strength. The plane was lurching with the renewed fury of the wind. The rain was increasing in violence. An occasional ball of hail banged like a cannon ball on the skin of the plane.

"The typhoon is overtaking us!" the ship's weather observer, Major Frank Patterson, came forward to tell them.

"T-here's not a chance with the ship crippled like this!" the injured pilot gasped.

"We can't ditch in the ocean!" the weather observer said quickly. "Those waves will pile up as much as a hundred feet high before the storm subsides. No human being could live in such a sea, no matter what kind of life vest he wore!"

"We'll never keep aloft," the pilot said, gritting his teeth against the pain from his cut head. "One engine is out now. Another is running rough. I don't expect it to hold out much longer. We have no directional aids. I don't know where in hell we are. Without a radio we haven't any chance of getting back to Hawaii."

"Look," the observer said, desperation in his voice. "This section of the Pacific is dotted with atolls. Can't we find one to crash land on?"

"Our navigator is dead," the pilot said wearily. "I don't know where we are. I don't know where any islands are."

One of the enlisted scanners stuck his head in the cockpit.

"Major!" he said, shouting to making himself heard above the howl of the wind ripping through the broken section of the windshield. "I checked the radio equipment like you told me. There isn't a chance of

patching it up enough to get any reception."

"What do we do?" the major said.

"Pray, if you still know how," the pilot said.

His head drooped with weariness. Rain splashing through the cracked plexiglass, ran down his face. The plane side-slipped dangerously as his feet slipped on the foot controls. He caught himself in time.

Slowly through the combined supreme efforts of himself and Napoleon Solo, they got the plane flying half way level again.

All of them knew the pilot couldn't hold out much longer. He had already done more than any person should be called upon to do.

It would only be a matter of a short time before he would collapse completely.

Illya Kuryakin offered to take his place.

"You can sit between us and tell us what to do."

The pilot shook his head. "What good will it do? I think I can hold out longer than the plane will."

"Do you think we could make it to some atoll island if we could get a fix on our position?" Napoleon asked. They could converse a little better since Major Patterson rigged up a canvas barrier that partially cut out the driving rain slamming into the cockpit.

"Maybe," the pilot said. "That's all I can say—maybe. In this kind of a storm, nothing is certain. We're being carried farther into it. We don't have sufficient power left in our crippled engines to fight our way out!"

Napoleon turned and shouted back over his shoulder to Kuryakin, "Illya! Can you raise New York on the pen-communicator?"

"I don't even know if the thing works," Kuryakin said. "I haven't tried it since we got it back from the police when they searched Taro. But I'll try."

He pulled out the tiny world-wide communication set. A twist of the cap extended the six inch aerial. He quickly spoke his identifying call letters and added, "Kuryakin calling Mr. Waverly. Emergency! Over!"

He repeated the call several times. Then he paused. Vicious bolts of lightning were ripping through the black boiling clouds. He waited until the worse of the display was over. Solo looked back at him anxiously as Illya tried again.

"Kuryakin calling Mr. Waverly! This is an emergency! Over!"

"—ryakin. This is Wav—"

That is all they got. Illya looked at Napoleon.

"Repeat!—Keep—repeatin—"

"He means keep repeating your message over and over," Solo said quickly. "The atmospherics are so bad it keeps killing part of the reception. But if you keep repeating it, they'll be able to assemble a complete message from the fragments!"

"Here goes!" Illya said. "I hope it does some good!"

The tone of his voice implied that he didn't have much hope.

ACT IX: THE CRASH

Slowly, desperately, Illya Kuryakin kept repeating a brief message. It took about five minutes before Waverly's broken transmission indicated that the U.N.C.L.E. chief understood their situation. He told them to keep transmitting while the great U.N.C.L.E. locator transmitters located in strategic places around the world tried to zero in on the pen-communicator transmission and get a fix on their position.

Three minutes later Waverly reported: "We will have you in forty-five minutes."

"We must land! We must land! We must land!" Illya kept repeating the message for a full minute. "Give us the coordinates for the nearest atoll! Give us—"

This interchange went on for what seemed forever to the anxious men in the plane. Finally there was a slight break in the rain static. They heard Waverly so clearly he seemed to be in the cockpit with them.

"The Alofa Atoll, a group off the beaten track but governed out of the British Gilbert Islands, is about twenty-five miles from your present location, as nearly as we can determine. The storm is interfering with our reception on the locator beams as well as on the radio. If you take a heading of—"

"All our directional equipment is out, sir," Illya interrupted to say. "We don't even have a working pocket compass. All we know is that we are circling."

There was a silence on the radio. "I think we've lost them," Illya said. "And only twenty-five miles away! It might as well be twenty-five million if we don't know which way to head!"

Then the pen-communicator speaker boomed out again. "Waverly here. Can you read me?"

"You are coming in loud and clear, sir," Illya said.

"I can barely hear you," Waverly said. "I will talk fast before my own transmission fails. Our directional beams can no longer pinpoint you exactly. It is impossible for us to give you directions."

"Well, that's it!" the pilot said wearily.

"But there is a bare possibility," Waverly went on. "We have direct lines open to New York Weather Central and Weather Central in Hawaii. Weather planes with long range radar were dispatched over two hours ago. They have the storm in their scopes, but cannot pick you up. In any event, they know the speed and location of the storm exactly. It has stopped pulsing and is picking up fury. It is moving directly toward Alofa Atoll. Are you reading me?"

"Clearly, sir," Illya said quickly.

"Then here is what the aviation and weather experts suggest," Waverly said. "They say it is your only chance."

"We'll take it!" Illya said.

Rain from the cracked window splattered his face and dripped to the flight deck.

"You must get into the eye of the storm. In your crippled condition you can't stay aloft in this violence. All prediction is for it to get worse. Get into the eye. Then, if you can keep circling for the next forty-five minutes, the typhoon will move directly over Alofa. After that you can crash land the best you can. Do you read me?"

"Yes, sir," Illya said.

"It's a desperate chance," Waverly said. "But it is all you have. Good luck. We'll all be pulling for you here!"

The next hour was the longest either of the men from U.N.C.L.E. had ever experienced. The drawn out terror of fighting the awful battering of the storm was the worst moments of their lives. They struggled to the point of total exhaustion to keep the plane flying a halfway level course. Those able to take the controls spelled each other until worked into exhaustion themselves.

The pitching of the plane was so bad all except Kuryakin were airsick. The rain and hail slammed the unfortunate plane. Once a terrific gust of wind seemed to whirl them in a circle. The plane side-slipped, at one point falling so far the crippled engines almost failed to bring her back up. Once the nose went down and the tail acted as if it wanted to take the lead. For a breathless moment the plane was completely out of control.

Kuryakin and Solo were at the controls. The injured pilot was thrown from his perch between them, slamming heavily against the

instrument panel.

Both men from U.N.C.L.E. hung on to the wheel, fighting to bring the plane's nose back up. Two of the crewmen pulled the pilot up, but a sudden shift of the wind piled them all on top of Solo. He lost his grip on the wheel. The savage fury of the wind was too much for one man to hold.

Kuryakin struggled, but the plane's nose went down again.

The plane picked up speed, plunging down at a forty-five degree angle.

"Some one help me!" Napoleon Solo gasped.

One of the crewmen sprang to his aid. Solo got his hands back on the other wheel. One of the other crewmen gave him a hand. The other tried to get the pilot back on his feet.

"Quick!" Solo gasped. "Ask him what we do now! We can't seem to bring it out of the dive!"

"He's out completely!" the sergeant bent over the pilot cried.

"Then what in Hades do we do?" Napoleon grated. "Doesn't anybody know how to fly this confounded thing?"

"Major Patterson! Can you take over these controls for me?" Illya said hurriedly. "I'll see if I can raise New York on the communicator again. Maybe Mr. Waverly can get us a pilot who can give us directions!"

"You had better get him in the next minute or two," Solo said. "The way we're going down, it won't be long! I can't see the ground, but it must be down there somewhere. The ocean, I mean."

Major Patterson slipped into the pilot's seat as Illya relinquished his grip on the wheel. He started to step back. As he did the plane gave a mighty lurch. The nose was thrown up until the plane almost stood on its tail.

Solo and Patterson, who had been pulling back on the controls with all their strength in an impossible attempt to bring the nose up, now frantically reversed procedures to try and bring it down again.

Illya's grip on the back of the pilot's seat was torn loose. He was thrown back, slamming against the back of the cockpit compartment

with a jarring force that momentarily stunned him. He hit the flight deck and his instinct for survival caused him to try and fight his way back on his feet again.

He got to his knees when another sickening turn of the plane threw him heavily against the back of the co-pilot's seat. He staggered up, hanging on the back of the seat occupied by Solo.

He was swaying so badly he did not immediately realize that the terrible wind had ceased.

He looked around in surprise. The slashing rain was gone. There were stars visible overhead. He blinked, still too dazed to comprehend the sudden stillness of the air about them.

Then Solo's voice cut through his hazy brain: "We're in the eye! Don't tell me we did that!"

"Not us," Patterson said from the pilot's seat. "It was the plane! It must have been, for I surely didn't know what I was doing!"

"I guess these planes are like the cavalry horses. The old soldiers used to tell recruits just to let the horses alone and they would get them through the drill. Horses had more sense than soldiers in those days!"

"We're still going down," Napoleon said, suddenly sobering after the first burst of jubilation at getting out of the wild winds of the spinning typhoon.

The plane was losing altitude as its overtaxed engines started cutting out momentarily, but not as badly as before.

"Can you see the atoll?" Patterson asked anxiously.

"I can't see a thing," Napoleon said. "Do you think the eye has already passed the island?"

Below it was dark, but they could easily make out the frothing sea. It looked white for the trapped waters were churned into a mad frenzy by the circling wall of terrific winds.

Nobody spoke for a moment. Each knew it was death for the plane to drop in those anguished waters.

"How is the pilot?" Solo asked. "Is there any way of bringing him to long enough to give us some instructions?"

Patterson crouched over the pilot's body looked up. He shivered.

"No, sir!" he said in a thick voice. "He's dead!"

"And the flight engineer is dead too," Solo said in a stricken voice.

Illya pulled himself together and reached for the pen-communicator. He shakily extended the aerial. All he got was a thick crackle of static from the boiling ring of clouds circling about the typhoon eye with speeds above one hundred and seventy-five knots.

Solo glanced back over his shoulder. "Illya! Can't you raise New York?"

"No," Kuryakin said, shoving the communicator back in his pocket.

"Well, that's it," Solo said grimly. "That looks like the atoll ahead. It is just emerging from the storm into the eye."

"Yes! That's it!" Patterson cried.

"But how do we land?" Solo said. "I wouldn't know what to do if there was a ten thousand foot runway. What can I do on a coral strip covered with coconut palms, and most of them blown down by the wind?"

They were still circling, trying to stay within the forty miles radius of the typhoon eye. But at the same time they were gradually losing altitude.

It was only a matter of minutes before they had to come down somewhere. Each second, the mad, vicious ocean was getting closer and closer to the belly of the doomed plane.

"What do we do?" Patterson said, his voice hoarse.

"Let's try to figure out something!" Solo replied. "What do you do when you land? You go down, level off, touch the wheels and roll. Going down is no problem. We're doing that any way."

"We can't roll," Patterson said. "So we can't use that to eat up our landing speed."

"How about pulling back on the stick just before we strike? That should bring the nose up and then the tail can drag and slow us down before the nose drops?" Illya suggested. "It seems to me that is the big problem. We have to get our speed down before we take the big bump."

"We would break the tail off," Patterson objected.

"Well, we'll break our own tails off if we don't!" the fiery little man from U.N.C.L.E. retorted.

Patterson had no answer to that one.

"Let's try it," Solo said, the deep lines of his face mirrored his bone weariness. The terrific struggle to hang on to the plane's controls had brought him close to the point of collapse.

"Well, you never know what you can do until you try it," Patterson said. His weary voice held little confidence.

TWO

They circled one more time and then headed directly in toward the storm-battled island. The atoll was a circular stand of coral built on the rim of an extinct undersea volcano to make a thin rim of tiny islands circling a small lagoon. The water in the lagoon, partially protected by the encircling reef, was not lashed to the terrible fury of the open sea.

They came in less than one hundred twenty-five feet above the sea. The boiling foam started striking the bottom of the plane as they descended lower.

They came over the south strip of islands at fifty feet. It was uninhabited and completely treeless. In the darkness Solo got just a glimpse of coral sand reflecting the starlight coming down through the open eye above them.

The larger island was looming up fast across the lagoon.

"Now!" Solo cried.

Both he and Patterson pulled back on the wheel, desperately trying to lift the nose of the plane. All the others braced themselves for the coming crash. Illya threw himself on the flight deck, pressing his back and the back of his head against the rear of the pilot's seat. He shoved his legs hard against the fuselage to brace himself.

The tail of the plane struck the lagoon. The crashing surf splashed higher than the plane. They were blinded by the foaming water striking the windshield. The tail dragged on the coral, sending a terrible vibration through the dying airplane. The two men in the pilot

and co-pilot's seat struggled to hold back on the stick, still fighting to keep the planes' nose up.

It was losing speed fast. One wing tip struck the huge bole of a coconut tree. They spun around. The other wing dug into the sand. The plane heaved up as if trying to fly again. It settled and the broken trunk of a palm, ripped by the typhoon, ripped through the fuselage.

Its splintered end sliced through Patterson's body. It rammed past Napoleon Solo and smashed into the instrument panel.

The plane hung there, rocking, each metal joint creaking in a dying agony.

Outside there was a glaring flash of light and fire burst through a tearing hold in the wing as one of the wing gas tanks exploded.

"We've got to get out!" Solo gasped. "Illya! Are you okay?"

"Yes," Kuryakin said shakily. "We've got one dead man, but the rest seem to be okay."

"I'm trapped," Solo said. "This broken palm trunk has me wedged in. Can you—"

Illya grabbed the palm trunk and heaved as Solo pushed with all his strength. It would not budge. Outside on the wing the flaming gas fire was eating closer to the cockpit.

Illya straightened up. "We're not doing any good. Just a minute, I'll get some help. I—"

"Hey!" one of the airmen cried from the back of the plane. "Somebody's coming! There's people on the island!"

"I'll get help!" Illya repeated to Solo. "I'll be right back."

Kuryakin turned and ran to the waist door of the plane. In the flickering light of the fire he could see several people running through the downed palms toward the wreck. One of the latter was a woman.

"Hurry!" Illya shouted to them. "We've got some men trapped in here!"

The first to clamber into the plane was a giant Polynesian man wearing only a native lava-lave loin cloth. Illya grabbed his arm.

"This way!" he gasped. "There's a man trapped in the cockpit. We must

get him out now, before the flames—"

The big Polynesian grunted. He grabbed the smaller man about the waist and threw him from the plane. Illya hit the wet coral sand, sprawling flat and just missing the bole of an uprooted palm.

He jerked himself up. "Hey!" he shouted. "I—"

"Stop! Stop, Mr. Solo!"

The cold feminine voice caused Illya to jerk around. He stared open-mouthed into the deadly hole of a .38 automatic held in the hand of Lupe de Rosa.

"Grab him!" she ordered.

A native in European dress sprang forward to grab Illya's arms. He tried to struggle, but in his weakened condition they handled him easily.

"Napoleon! Napoleon!" he shouted. "We're in the hands of THRUSH! We crashed on a THRUSH controlled island!"

The European smashed him in the face. Illya sagged. They let him drop. He fell face down in the sand.

Inside the cockpit, Napoleon heard Illya's warning cry. He knew it was impossible to extricate himself in time. The tree trunk was pressed so tightly across his chest that he couldn't even get to his gun in its shoulder holster.

He reached out and rubbed his hand over the bloody body of the dead man in the pilot's seat. He streaked the blood across his own temple and sagged his head against the trunk. He closed his eyes.

The big Polynesian came into the cockpit. He looked at the smashed body of the pilot and grunted. He looked at Solo and reached for Napoleon's wrist. He felt the pulse and grunted again.

He wrapped his huge arms about the entrapping tree trunk and heaved. The bole shivered and moved just a fraction of an inch. The giant relaxed, took a deep breath and grasped the tree trunk again.

Outside the blazing fire was moving rapidly up the plane's wing. Solo could feel the heat, scorching against his head.

But as the big Polynesian grasped the log for a final heave to free Solo,

a voice with a Middle-Eastern accent said from behind them:

"Leave him! It's not worth the trouble."

"Him still alive!" the Polynesian said.

"He won't be long!" the newcomer said and laughed. "Let the fire take care of him."

The Polynesian straightened up. "You big boss," he said.

"I sure as hell am and don't you ever forget it. Come on. Let him burn!"

ACT X: THE THRUSH OUTPOST

When Illya Kuryakin regained consciousness, he found himself strapped in a chair inside a small room jammed with electronic gear. The first thing he saw when he opened his eyes was the angry face of Lupe de Rosa. The first thing he heard was her bitter voice: "Kill him! He has caused me nothing but trouble!"

"That's what I like in my girl friends," Illya mumbled. "Quiet, shy, lovable—"

She hit him hard across the mouth. A trickle of blood ran down from a cut where her blow drove his lip against his teeth.

She whirled on a tall man with a middle-Eastern accent.

"Where is the other one?" she snapped.

"Miss de Rosa!" he said in a harsh voice. "You may be the chief scientist for this project, but I am in charge of this station! I am responsible to THRUSH headquarters for its security. Not you. I will stay out of your technical business. You will stay out of my security affairs!"

"If you had done your work properly here, it would not have been necessary for me to come!" she snapped. "These storms lost energy because this station did not operate correctly. We must have three points of electronic focus to build up these typhoons to the point where their own energy will carry them forward. Your station here did not reach full energy capacity!"

"That was not my fault," he said defensively. "The equipment you sent was defective."

"It was no such thing!" she snapped. "I personally checked it out before it left South America. The trouble was in sabotage—*here!* Now what about your highly vaunted security!"

The tall field chief grabbed Lupe's shoulder. "If you try to send out a report like that, I'll—"

Lupe's hand flashed down to her handbag. She didn't bother to draw the gun cached there. She fired through the leather. The field chief clutched his stomach. Blood pumped between his agonized fingers. He pitched forward on his face.

The girl from THURSH whirled to face the others, drawing the gun from her bag. The group, three European and the big Polynesian, stared silently at her.

"Get the THRUSH-Pacific on the coder!" she snapped. "It sends though the water. The storm atmospheric will not interfere."

One of the Europeans came to remove a silver key from the body of the dead man. He moved back, keeping a wary eye on the gun in Lupe's hand.

He inserted the key in an electronic box. The key completed a complicated circuit inside.

A voice from the box said, "Four-oh-one. The check shows the mixer-coder in operation. We cannot be intercepted. You may speak."

This is THRUSH outpost three," Lupe said, going over to the mike, but keeping her gun on the men. "I had to liquidate the field chief here. Inform the rest of my status, please."

"The lady known to you as Lupe de Rosa is a member of the Supreme THRUSH scientific board. Her orders take precedence over all other THRUSH agents below Division One level. Is this understood?"

Each of the men, including the Polynesian, were required to give his identification number into the black box and their understanding.

"Can you report now?" the voice asked Lupe.

"You have my report to the time I contacted the *Waterloo*. I was unable to go aboard because of the high seas. However, the data I received from the ship permitted me to deduce the trouble. It came from a weak signal generated by one of the focalpoints we use to start the gravitational spin to create the revolving storm. I came here in the submarine after ordering the guidance crew on the *Waterloo* to move the storm's eye over the atoll here."

"Excellent!" the THRUSH voice said. "What did you learn?"

"The trouble is sabotage! Someone in this group deliberately grounded the central machine. It could not put out full power. The saboteur is surely still among us!"

"There are electronic interrogation machines in the submarine," the THRUSH voice said. "Did it remain?"

"Yes, it is submerged in the lagoon to keep it from being harmed when the eye passes," Lupe said.

"Call the sub commander and have one of the machines brought up to the control room," the THRUSH voice said. "Ferret out the traitor as quickly as possible—and take care of him! I'd like a report as soon as possible on his identity."

"I will do so," Lupe said crisply. "I also have either Solo or Kuryakin prisoner here. I never could get their faces straight in my mind. The other one is dead. He burned up in the plane crash."

"Wonderful!" the THRUSH voice said. "Give him a complete interrogation on the machine. File a full report of all you learn from him. This will give us a full picture of how much U.N.C.L.E. knows of our present program. This is a wonderful break!"

"Then may I—liquidate—him after the interrogation?" Lupe asked with a vicious sidelong glance at Illya.

"You may have the pleasure, my dear!" the voice replied.

What hit Illya Kuryakin hardest was not the death sentence imposed on him, but Lupe's claim that Napoleon had burned to death in the plane.

He swallowed a huge lump in his throat and stared stonily at his captors.

Silently he promised himself that he would find some way to avenge Napoleon Solo before they destroyed him.

Lupe also turned to face the outpost crew.

"None of you are to leave this room until we get the interrogator over here!" she snapped.

She walked around to face Illya. He took a deep breath. The belts binding him to the chair cut into his arms.

"I'm willing to make a deal," he said in a toneless voice.

She smiled cruelly. "I've been with THRUSH for five years. I was recruited right out of college and sent to work with that fool Santos-Lopez. So you see I have had plenty of experience with U.N.C.L.E. and its people. You do not make deals."

"Can I bring up one point to convince you that I might?" Illya asked quietly, giving her a steady stare.

She gave him a sharp look back. "I'll listen to anything." she said.

"It is this," Kuryakin said. "What makes you think this is the only place where we were able to plant saboteurs?"

She started. She started breathing hard. Her face turned white.

Stabbing in the dark, but basing his supposition on her alarm, he said, "I know that this storm brewer is your baby. It means everything to you because you developed it from Santos-Lopez's basic data on storm destruction. You saw a way to twist his principles around. You sold the idea to THRUSH. You'll go high with them if it works. You may not need any social security for your old age if it fails—for people who fail THRUSH don't have old ages. I might keep you from failing!"

"You're trying to trick me!" she snapped. "I can get everything out of your mind with the interrogation machine and you know it!"

"Can you?" Illya said and gave her a malicious grin. "What about this!"

He partially opened his mouth and made a quick flip of his tongue too fast for her to follow clearly.

"See it?" he said and sneered at her. "It's a mouth capsule—of poison, Lupe! I'm going to die anyway. I heard that voice from THRUSH pronounce sentence on me. I'm going to beat you to the punch! All I have to do is crush down on this thing with my teeth—and there'll be no mind left for you to probe!"

She sucked in her breath sharply. Her eyes searched his face, looking for some clue to the truth of his claim.

"I don't believe you!" she cried hoarsely.

Illya Kuryakin shrugged. "That's a chance you have to take. Shall I point out the saboteur here—as a mark of my good faith? Then if I prove right when you put him on the interrogator, maybe we can make a deal on what other U.N.C.L.E. men are hidden in your organization, here and in the Atlantic."

"I don't believe you!" she whispered again.

"Okay!" Illya said.

He looked over the silent, tense group of men across the room from them. He selected the one he least thought could possibly be the unknown saboteur.

"That's the one!" he said, nodding his head toward the man.

The man, small and with a rat-face, squeaked in alarm. "That's a lie! That's a lie! He's lying like a dog! Don't believe him. He—"

He lost his sense of judgment in his alarm. He started toward Lupe, his arms outstretched in fearful supplication.

"Stop!" Lupe snarled, and before the frightened man could obey she shot him.

The rest stared in silent fascination at the dead man. Illya's anxious eyes were scanning their faces. He was seeking some clue to which was the real saboteur.

When he first mentioned that he was going to reveal the man's name, the noticed the big brutish Polynesian unconsciously grip his fists. Then when he named the rat-faced man, the fists relaxed.

He thought this very curious. His eyes went back to the giant. It seemed impossible for this nearly naked native to know enough about the operations to sabotage it in the first place. And even more puzzling, what could be his motive?

Obviously the man lived on this island. He was here when the THRUSH men came. He certainly was not an U.N.C.L.E. agent. And so far as Illya Kuryakin knew, no other organization was aware of these stormy operations.

He caught the giant's eye. The big Polynesian looked back at him dully, the very picture of brutish stupidity.

"It can't be," Illya told himself.

His eyes sought the faces of the others as they listened to the cold, murderous voice of Lupe de Rosa warn them that the same bullet would be waiting for any of them who tried to come toward her until she determined which was the traitor.

Illya stared at her, then looked back at the big Polynesian. The giant stared straight ahead, his face still a mask of stupidity.

"Maybe—" Illya told himself. "Maybe, but if he did—why?"

TWO

His thoughts were interrupted by a thin chime from among the masses of electronic equipment. After warning the huddled group of men not to move, Lupe went over to the machine. Watching her, Illya could see why she had risen so high in THRUSH circles. She was completely ruthless in furthering her ambitions.

Lupe de Rosa pressed a circuit switch. Immediately the voice they had heard before came out of the speaker.

"We have received reports from the *Waterloo* that the storm has maintained its strength. This indicates that the Pacific tests are now successful. What is your considered opinion in launching an immediate attack according to Plan A?"

"I am ready," the girl said firmly.

"Good!" the voice said. "We must know if U.N.C.L.E. is sufficiently aware of our activity to throw any kind of barrier in our way. As soon as the interrogator turns the mind of this U.N.C.L.E. man inside out, report at once."

"Yes, sir," Lupe said.

"Then if we are safe from U.N.C.L.E., the attack of storms against the East and West Coasts of the United States, Hawaii, Japan, India, France, England, the North Countries and the Mediterranean countries will be launched exactly twelve hours from now. Is there any technical reason why this should not be done?"

"None!" Lupe said firmly.

"Excellent. If this succeeds, you will be more than amply rewarded. You have earned our deepest gratitude."

The girl's face flushed with pleasure as the connection was broken. Kuryakin shivered as he thought of the utter devastation the chain of hurricanes and storms would bring to the world. He knew that meteorologists claimed the damage from one typhoon was equal to a thousand atom bombs. This meant that THRUSH's stormy attack would bring more destruction to the world than if all the nuclear powers on earth fired all their stockpiled atomic bombs. The terror, devastation and death would be beyond belief.

His grim thoughts were broken by a sudden bellow from the big Polynesian.

"Missy!" he cried, his deep voice sounded like the bass blast of a conch horn. "The prisoner! He moved! I think his arms loose!"

"What?" Lupe cried, whirling about. "Check him!"

"Yes, Missy!" the giant said and lumbered toward Illya. Kuryakin was sure now that he was the saboteur.

He waited breathlessly to see what trick the native would pull.

As the big man rounded the bank of computer cases, he suddenly grabbed one and overturned it. It smashed back into Lupe. She fell with a strangled cry. Her gun exploded into the bunker ceiling as she fell.

The giant whirled. His face no longer looked stupid. He caught the back of Illya's chair. He sent it and its bound occupant crashing into the men who charged him.

Illya and the chair crashed into the three men. They all sprawled into a heap. The wooden chair legs collapsed, leaving Kuryakin's arms still bound to the intact back.

Before any of them could scramble up, the native hit the light switch. In the wild melee in the dark Illya crawled to one side and got to his feet. He started to twist and strain in a frantic attempt to free himself.

Across the computer room the door opened. He glimpsed the native leaping out into the night. He tried to follow and crashed into one of the THRUSH men. They both fell. Before Kuryakin could get up, the lights came on. He saw one of the men aiming a savage blow at his head. He tried to dodge, but didn't make it.

The blow was not sufficient to knock him out, but it kicked him off balance. He fell and his head struck the edge of the upset computer. He sprawled flat. His senses reeled. He fought to hold his consciousness.

As if from a great distance he heard Lupe's outraged screams for the men to help her reset the fallen computer.

"The storm is out of control without it!" she cried.

As if in answer to her cry, the eye began to move from its stationary position over the atoll. The wild winds whipped toward the island.

ACT XI: THE PASSING STORM

Napoleon Solo kept his eyes closed as the THRUSH man ordered the big Polynesian to leave him to burn in the flaming plane. The native moved the imprisoning log slightly in his first attempt to free the man from U.N.C.L.E. Solo was afraid to test it with the two still about.

The sounds from the back showed him that Kuryakin was captured. He knew that their only chance lay in himself staying free. He did not feel that he could capture the entire island alone. He hoped only to stay free long enough for the storm to pass. Then the atmospheric would clear up sufficiently for the pen-communicator to get a message out to U.N.C.L.E. headquarters.

After that it didn't matter what happened to him.

Out on the wing the flaming gasoline was spreading rapidly toward the cockpit. He knew he had only minutes left. He raised his head slowly. The pilot's compartment door was open. He could see the THRUSH men taking their Air Force prisoners out through the waist door.

If they looked around they could see him. But it was a risk he had to take.

The flames were so close to the cockpit that the heat was scorching through the metal skin of the plane.

He pushed against the log. He was unable to bulge it. The terrific heat of the encroaching fire was causing the sweat to roll down his face. The slight movement made by the Polynesian giant helped some. He could move slightly, but not enough to squeeze out.

He relaxed, panting from his exertions. The heat was becoming unbearable. He pressed his body up as tightly as he could against the imprisoning log. He reached in behind, struggling to loosen the belt that held the seat padding in place. He grabbed one end and tried to pull it free.

It came part of the way and stuck. He took a fresh grip and jerked again. His hand was so sweaty from the increasing heat that his fingers slipped. He hastily dried them on his trouser leg and took a fresh grip. He sucked in his stomach and pressed his body up, grating against the rough trunk of the tree.

He slowly pulled the padding away.

This gave him extra space and he started working his body free. It came slowly, tearing his clothing and in places raking the flesh raw.

He finally pulled himself free and fell back on the flight deck. The metal was unbearably hot. The plexiglass side windows suddenly shattered under the terrific heat of the burning wing. Flames licked hungrily into the cockpit. Solo staggered back through the hatch into the waist of the plane.

He peered cautiously through the broken door. The THRUSH men had gone with their prisoners.

He hesitated, then jumped down to the ground. He bent almost double and scurried into the uprooted coconut grove to keep from presenting a target against the light of the blazing plane.

The typhoon devastation was terrific. The once densely palmed island had half its trees snapped or uprooted. Looking about, Napoleon could see the giant wall of the eye moving in. The storm was but half over. He realized he had only a short time before the island would again be lashed by the fury of the typhoon. Unless he found some sort of shelter, there was little chance that he would survive the storm.

He started to circle, seeking tracks in the wet sand to show him where the THRUSH men took their prisoners. He found the tracks leading up the beach. He was afraid to walk along the sand for fear he would be spotted. He took the difficult way, climbing over the broken, uprooted trees.

As he went he carefully checked his protective devices. The .38 special was still in his shoulder holster. In his pockets he carried several of the standard U.N.C.L.E. defensive equipment. The pen-communicator. A chewing gum that was actually a power explosive. A ring with a secret needle for dispensing knockout drops. Mints which developed a blinding smokescreen when dropped in water. A tie pin hiding a bulb of tear gas.

Each of them at one time or another had saved his life in a tight spot. Right then he had no idea what he could do or how he could use them, but he took comfort in their presence.

He continued to follow the trail until it branched. One line, with the most footprints led back toward the lagoon. The second, showing only the marks of three people.

Solo hesitated, knowing that he was throwing away any chance of success if he chose the wrong track. He got down on his hands and knees. The wet sand held the impression well, but he was unable to determine if either of the footprints belonged to Kuryakin. However, one definitely was a woman's print.

He got up, making a decision to follow it. He continued for several hundred yards and after climbing over a jumbled mass of uprooted trees, he came to a hill or large mound.

He stopped, suddenly suspicious. Such a formation was decidedly unusual on a normally flat coral island. Once it apparently had been covered with brush and vines. The storm had ripped these away. Under the torn areas he could see the marks of a concrete structure under the carefully arranged soil. He circled it, seeking some kind of an entrance. He found it at the north end. Once it had been carefully screened by vines, but the typhoon had ripped them away.

"They must have taken Illya and the Air Force prisoners in there," he told himself.

He sat down on an uprooted palm. He was bone weary. His arms and legs ached from the struggle to keep the plane in the air. His skin burned.

Solo permitted himself only the briefest rest. Then he took a deep breath and tried to whip his flagging brain into action. A dozen wild plans turned over in his mind. He discarded every one as being impossible and wearily started over again.

He knew he could not expect to force the opening into the underground shelter. There was an excellent possibility he could blow an opening in the door with his explosive "chewing gum." Kneaded and fused with its almost microscopic cap, the U.N.C.L.E. developed super-explosive no bigger than a wad of gum packed the power of several sticks of dynamite.

However, he had no way of knowing what was immediately beyond the door. He would be sacrificing his element of surprise, his most precious asset, for little advantage.

He decided that his greatest chance of success lay in drawing the THRUSH men from the shelter where he could ambush as many as possible.

Once his decision was made, Napoleon Solo worked rapidly. He

carefully prepared two wads of the gum explosive and stuck them to ends of sticks. These he carefully laid on the sand beside him. Then he took a third and attached it to a small splinter of wood.

He raised up slowly from his hiding place behind a tangled pile of storm riven trees. There seemed no guards about the outside of the THRUSH outpost.

He crept quickly to the side of the mound covering the structure. He pushed a hole in the wet sand, using a piece of stick. He adjusted the tiny automatic fuse, no bigger than a BB shot, for a five-minute time lag and hurried back to his protected spot.

He did not expect the explosion to break an opening. It wasn't designed for that. He was sure that this place had some connection with the THRUSH storm generating system. If so, that meant there would have to be considerable electronic equipment inside. He wanted to create a shock wave to throw the equipment off register. This, he hoped, would bring the operators rushing out to find the cause.

When they did, they would be met by a devastating bomb made by more gum explosive stuck to the wooden stick. He hoped under the confusion of this blast to get inside. Then if his suspicions were true about the function of the bunker-type building, the third gum bomb would effectively destroy the interior.

It seemed an effective plan. The only thing that worried him was the whereabouts of the prisoners. He was sure that they were also in the bunker. An explosion to rip up the storm generating equipment could injure or even kill them. He hoped there was some way to avoid that, but if not, then he knew Illya Kuryakin would understand.

The lives of millions were more important than the lives of a few. Every U.N.C.L.E. agent knew this. As military men, the Air Forces prisoners would understand as well.

Napoleon Solo looked at the luminous dial of his watch. It had been but a single minute since he placed the charge. This surprised him. It seemed an age. He shook the watch to make sure it was running.

Then, as he looked up, he saw something move in the darkness behind him. He whirled. There was a rustling of the broken palms for the utter stillness of the typhoon eye was starting to break with some wind as the wall of clouds moved closer to the atoll with the passing of the eye. A few drops of rain were starting to fall.

Napoleon looked anxiously at the sky, hoping the full fury of the returning storm would hold off until he completed his mission.

If he could destroy the outpost, he would consider himself paid for. After that, if he came out of it alive, he had plenty to live for. If not—well, it had been a good life while it lasted. He couldn't complain.

He turned back to watch for the explosion, sure that what he had seen was a wind-blown palm. Then out of the corner of his eye he caught another suspicious movement. This time it was too definite to be his imagination.

He whirled, jerking his hand toward his shoulder holster. He was just a fraction of a second late. His assailant swung at his head with a piece of wooden pole. Solo ducked, but his legs bumped against the mass of uprooted trees. It threw him off balance and he took the savage blow on the shoulder. It knocked him to his knees. He glimpsed the flash of brown skin as his unknown attacker tried to hit again.

This time the tree trunks interfered with his assailant. Napoleon ducked another blow and managed to get the gun out. He got his first good look at his attacker. He started with surprise. It was a girl—a native in a sarong she wore as beautifully as if she came from a technicolored Hollywood film.

TWO

She hesitated in the face of his gun.

"Don't move!" Solo said.

She stood staring at him. The rising wind whipped her hair. He couldn't see her face too clearly in the darkness. Suddenly she leaped back, jumping over two entwined broken trees. She dropped out of sight.

Napoleon Solo heard her move. She seemed to be circling, seeking a chance to attack him again. Suddenly he started. He wondered why his usually sharp mind had not noticed the most peculiar thing about her before.

This was how quietly she fought him. Had she been attached to THRUSH she would surely have called for help.

"Where are you?" he called softly. "Don't be afraid. I am not one of

them. I am their enemy who came by the *vakalele*."

The rustling noise ceased.

"Don't you understand?" he said. "If I was one of them, I would have shouted for help. I am their enemy and your friend."

This argument was telling. She realized the same as he that a THRUSH agent would have yelled. He would not have fought in silence as they both did, each afraid of alerting the enemy inside the bunker.

She stepped back into the small clearing.

Napoleon Solo looked at his watch. There was still two minutes before the explosion.

"You came in the boat that flies?" she said, her voice low and as sweet as he always imagined the brown-skinned beauties of the Far Pacific islands.

"Yes," he said. "What are these men doing here? How can we help each other?"

"They are evil men!" she said fiercely. "They came to our island. They threatened us with death. They forced our people to build and slave for them."

"What are they doing here?"

"I do not know," she said. "But my—the man I love, he knows. He is the son of the talking chief and very smart. He went to the native college in Laie and then came back here. He said they were very evil men and he would find out what they were doing and when the British commissioner makes his annual inspection, he would tell him."

"Where is your boy friend now?" Solo asked. "Perhaps he and I can work together."

"He is in there," she pointed at the closed door of the bunker. "He is very big and very strong. They use him for their work slave. He makes them think he is stupid so he can learn what they are doing."

"I see," Napoleon said, remembering the big Polynesian who tried to free him in the plane.

"Oh, I am so afraid for him!" the girl cried. "That is why I came here to watch. I am afraid they will find him spying and kill him!"

"We'll help him," Napoleon assured her. "How about your people? How many of them can we trust to help us?"

"They will do what Kahlihi tells them," she said.

"Can you arrange for me to talk to Kahlihi?"

"He is with the bad men," she replied. "Even I cannot get to talk to him. That is why I came here in the storm. I just want to see him."

"Then can I talk to your next chief?"

"Nobody will talk to you unless Kahlihi orders," she replied. "They fear all strangers."

"But can't—"

"There is nothing anyone can do. These bad men have placed a terrible taboo on this end of the island. Any of our people who come here, except those chosen for slaves, die by the death lights?"

"What are the death lights?"

"They placed them around this end of the island. They work night and day and anyone approaching this place dies. The storm tore them down and so I came, hoping just to see my beloved. Just a glimpse of him is all I ask. Then I could sneak away. After the storm they will replace the lights."

There was a resigned defiance on the girl's face that told him she spoke the truth. Mentally he drew a line through the idea that he might get native help. Whatever he did he must do alone.

"What about you?" he asked, "Will you help me?"

"If Kahlihi tell me to," she replied.

Napoleon Solo sighed, defeated.

"Well, I guess—"

He broke off startled by the sudden opening of the bunker door. The big Polynesian came bounding through it. Napoleon saw the shadow of someone running after him. He saw the outline of a gun raised in the shadow's hand.

The girlscreamed. Napoleon tried to grab her hand, but she broke

away, running to help her lover.

Solo jerked his gun out and half raised up from behind the protecting barrier of trees.

Before he could shoot to protect the hysterical girl, the charge he set went off. Wet sand and debris shot into the air. The ground rocked. The shot fired at her went wild. Shooting before the sound of the explosion died, Napoleon put a shot into the body of the THRUSH man. Then he jumped the storm piled debris and ran toward the bunker door, carrying his improvised gum bomb.

A shot whined past his ear. Someone was shooting at him from inside the door. He threw himself flat, scrambling for cover. Another bullet smacked into the coconut log.

"Give me some help! I think it's that other rat from U.N.C.L.E.!" the gunman yelled back inside the bunker. "He wasn't burned after all!"

"Get on the intercom radio!" Napoleon recognized Lupe de Rosa's voice. "Call the submarine! Tell them to send men up here at once!"

THREE

The wind was rising fast. The rain was getting harder. Napoleon Solo knew the full fury of the typhoon would be upon him within minutes. His chances of survival here in the open were slim. Even if he lived, he would come out of it so beaten and exhausted he could not possibly hope to elude the searchers Lupe was sending to hunt him.

He felt he had only one slim chance—and he took it. He jumped up, even though it presented a perfect target for the gunman and hurled the gum bomb at the open doorway.

As he threw, he heard the report of the THRUSH gun. But the gunman fired too quickly, startled as he was by the unexpected appearance of Solo. The bullet went wild and Napoleon fell flat, scrambling for protection behind the fallen trees.

As he fell, the gum bomb went off. It was a larger charge than the one he set in the ground to pull attention out the bunker. It ripped the concrete facing around the door, and ripped the heavy wooden barrier from its hinges.

Smoke, debris and dust from the shattered concrete choked the opening. Solo, gun clutched in his hand, leaped the fallen trees and

darted toward the opening. The wind was increasing in fury by the second. Napoleon could only hope that he could get inside before the wind flushed the dust and smoke away.

He charged into the blinding cloud, bumped against the shattered door and pressed against the inside wall. He held his gun ready to shoot at the first sign of a target.

"Put up your hands, Mr. Solo!"

It was Lupe de Rosa's voice, cold and deadly.

"I have you squarely in the sights of an infra-red scope!" she went on. "You know I can see you perfectly in the dark!"

Her voice echoed so that Napoleon could not place her position. He let the gun and the last remaining gum bomb drop from his hands to the floor.

"Get a light!" Lupe snapped. "And shore up that broken door. The storm is moving again. I don't want the rain ruining our equipment."

Light flooded the room. Napoleon Solo saw the girl standing across the room with a THRUSH gun aimed at him.

There were two THRUSH men across from her. Illya Kuryakin lay on the floor by Lupe's feet. His hands were bound to a chair back. Remnants of the rest of the chair were scattered, showing Illya had put up some kind of battle. His legs were free. Kuryakin didn't move.

Napoleon flicked a quick glance at the two THRUSH men. Neither seemed to be armed, but he could not be sure.

"Bind him!" Lupe snapped, motioning toward Solo. "I want his mind dredged by the interrogation machine before he's shot. This is a break. The other one may be dead, but we can still find out what U.N.C.L.E. knows about our work. Where is that machine? Get on the intercom and call the sub after you tie him up."

The two men came toward Solo, but Lupe was too smart for him. When he tensed, she warned the men: "Get back, you fools! Don't come between my gun and that U.N.C.L.E. rat!"

The two men jumped aside, split and circled around the bank of electronic equipment to come at Napoleon Solo from different sides.

Solo shot them a quick glance. Neither appeared to be armed—probably because Lupe did not trust them. He cut his eyes back for the briefest contact with Kuryakin. Illya gave him a nod.

Suddenly Illya kicked the side of a computer with his unbound foot. Lupe jumped at the unexpected noise. She jerked her head around. The two men stopped to look back.

In that brief instant of their inattention, Napoleon Solo ducked behind a line of computers. He grabbed the corner of an electronic cabinet and overturned it as the two men leaped for him.

Lupe gave a strangled cry of rage and whirled to bring her gun to bear on Solo as he raised up to overturn another cabinet to slow down the two men pursuing him.

Illya Kuryakin lurched to his feet. His hands were still bound to the chair back, but he bent low and rammed his head into the small of the girl's back. She fell and her head smashed against the side of a computer.

Kuryakin turned and kicked at the gun that fell from her nerveless fingers.

He sent it skidding down the path between the banks, directly toward Solo.

Napoleon stooped to grab it, but before he could straighten up, one of the THRUSH men leaped on his back. They both fell. Solo twisted to avoid a knee in his stomach.

The second man's foot slammed down on his wrist as he sought to jerk the gun up. The first man caught Solo with a savage kick in the ribs. Napoleon managed to catch his foot with his one free hand. The THRUSH man fell heavily on top of Solo.

Kuryakin came charging toward them. He was still unable to free his hand, but he caught the second THRUSH man with a hard drive of his hunched shoulder, knocking the man back against another of the long line of electronic cabinets.

Freed momentarily of the double menace, Napoleon Solo caught his opponent with a hard blow to the chin. The man's head snapped back and his eyes glazed. Napoleon grabbed the THRUSH gun with his left hand. As he opponent tried to jump him again, Solo pulled the trigger. He whirled as the second assailant tried to duck around Kuryakin.

Solo pulled the trigger a second time.

Kuryakin stepped back quickly to avoid the falling body. He grinned at his battered partner.

"I've been glad to see a lot of things in my life," he said. "But never have I been so glad to see anyone as I was you!"

Solo tried to grin back, but his mouth was too battered by a blow he never even knew he took. "And I guess Waverly was right," he said through his puffy lips. "You are the difference!"

"What do we do now?" Illya asked as Napoleon unbound his arms.

"What do you know about this stuff?" he waved his hands at the electronic gear still operating.

"From what I overheard," Illya said. "There are three of these outposts. It takes a radiation feed from all three to keep the storm going. The *Waterloo* focuses the transmitted beams and directs the storm. That big black box in the center is the transmitter."

"Then let's see what happens," Solo said. He raised the THRUSH gun and put three quick shots through the plexiglass window in front. Bulbs shattered and there was a flash of blue light as the circuit shorted.

For a moment it seemed to have no effect, the increasing fury of the storm battered at the broken door of the bunker.

"I guess it didn't—" Illya began.

The rest of his words were lost in a tremendous explosive sound like the crash of a hundred bombs. The concrete bunker shook with the violent force of a severe earthquake. The lights went out. Two great cracks ripped across the concrete ceiling.

Water poured in. The rain suddenly became a solid mass of water as the clouds dumped their entire contents at once.

"We had better get out of here!" Illya Kuryakin shouted above the din. "This ceiling looks like it is going to come all the way down any second!"

"We'll drown outside!" Solo shouted back.

"Okay! So you get to pick the way you want to die!"

"Then let's drown! It's better than being crushed!" Solo said.

They started for the door, but by the time they arrived, the clouds were gone, wrung dry by that one great deluge.

Water ran a foot deep in the bunker and across the island. But the sky over head showed stars to all horizons.

"Great!" Illya said. "We should be able to get a call in to Mr. Waverly. We have definite proof now. He can get Air Force planes out to sink the *Waterloo*."

"Then there is the matter of the Air Force prisoners," Solo said.

"They were taken to the submarine for safe keeping. It is in the lagoon."

"We'll have to do something about that," Napoleon said.

"What can we do?" Illya asked.

"We can figure out something, I guess," Solo said. "Do you mind if I pass that detail to you?"

But as it happened, this was not necessary. The girl, Aloma, came running to meet them. Breathlessly she told Solo that her lover, the big Polynesian, had rallied his people after he escaped from the bunker. Those in the sub had not heard of his defection and opening the hatch when he called. He held it open until his war party broke in. They took the vessel.

Illya Kuryakin looked at the girl with open admiration.

"Say, Solo," he said, "Ask her if she's got a sister?"

"Sister?" the girl said, "Oh, yes, I get!"

"Wait!" Napoleon said. "He was just joking. He—"

"Speak for yourself!" Illya retorted.

A few minutes later, after they made sure that the THRUSH sub crew was completely subdued, Napoleon Solo contacted Mr. Waverly on the pen-communicator.

He gave a brief report. Waverly promised to get planes and ships out to locate the *Waterloo* and the other two outposts. At the same time,

they would send search planes into the Pacific and Indian oceans to find the storm generating positions there.

"We have Lupe de Rosa under guard," Napoleon said. "She's still pretty dizzy from a blow on the head. As soon as she is able we'll interrogate her under the truth serum. I think then we will have the complete story and locations. That will wind up the whole affair."

"Excellent, Mr. Solo," Mr. Waverly said. "And how is Mr. Kuryakin?"

"Great!" Napoleon said. "You know that pretty native girl I told you helped us?"

"You mean that she and Kuryakin—?"

"No, sir. She has a native boy friend. Illya asked her if she had a sister. She did."

"Oh, so Mr. Kuryakin and the sister are looking at the tropic moon?"

"Yes, sir, and is she lovely. The biggest brown eyes you ever saw. Wavy hair down to her shoulders. A laughing mouth. And she is wearing a genuine grass skirt."

"Hmmm!" the U.N.C.L.E. chief said. "Maybe I'd better hurry that plane out for you before Mr. Kuryakin goes native."

"Oh, I don't know," Solo said. "You see Aloma either didn't understand what Illya meant when he asked if she had a sister or she is a great kidder. Just a minute I'll tune you in on the romance—"

In New York the U.N.C.L.E. chief was startled to hear his agent's voice say: "No! No. it's 'Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake, *baker's* man—"

Then a tiny voice said, "Pat-eee—cake, Pat—ee-cake—"

"What?" Waverly said.

"That's right," Solo replied. "The sister is almost, but not quite three years old!"

Waverly chuckled. "Tell Mr. Kuryakin I said, 'Better luck next time!'"

THE END

* * * * *

[home](#)

posted 10.25.2009, transcribed by Selyndae

Table of Contents

ACT I: A STORMY FUTURE

ACT II: THE STRANGE STORM

ACT III: THE STORM GIRL

ACT IV: VANISHING LADY

ACT V: "SO LONG, LUPE!"

ACT VI: WATERLOO?

ACT VII: GIRL IN THE DARK

ACT VIII: INTO THE STORM

ACT IX: THE CRASH

ACT X: THE THRUSH OUTPOST

ACT XI: THE PASSING STORM